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**HEROINES AND WHORES: TRANSGRESSIVE WOMEN IN
BRITISH FEMINIST NOVELS, 1790-1814**

by

Caroline Pari

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

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PREFACE

Everyone knew in the 1950's why a girl from a nice family left home. The meaning of her theft of herself from her parents was clear to all--as well as what she'd be up to in that room of her own.

(Joyce Johnson, Minor Characters 106)

When a colleague recently asked why I was interested in British women writers of the 1790s, I began to wonder the same. I easily found many influences in my education that contributed to my interest in feminist writings. But a particular incident came to mind that captured the sense of conflict I felt as a young, independent woman coming of age in the 1980s and may explain how I identified with my heroines.

The time I spent immediately after college living with my twin sister on *our* own was an exciting period of my life. In my attempt to escape from my working-class background, I was freed from my parents' restrictions, and began an independent life by paying bills, owning a car and filling up the refrigerator for the first time in my life. I was in graduate school, teaching at a college, and on my way to the middle class. But, soon I realized that I was still living in poverty and that I had traded my parents in for some uncompromising and eccentric landlords.

My sister and I rented the first floor apartment of a three-story house from Mr and Mrs. M. Mrs. M was a large, brazen, domineering woman in her 50's or 60's who dyed her hair jet black, wore flashy clothes and ornate jewelry, and yelled commands to her short, frail husband. A Korean family lived on the second floor, about six or seven Lebanese brothers on the third floor, and an insane and violent man was in the basement. We all had to pay our high rents in cash. Our landlords also demanded that everyone keep their apartments clean and they regularly visited the apartment house to clean the halls,

steps, and front and backyards. In her dress and high heels, looking like she was ready for a Saturday evening dinner outing, my landlady would put on a pair of yellow rubber gloves and pine-sol the place. She seemed the type who'd vacuum the backyard if she could. I recall that one of the reasons she was happy to rent the apartment to us was because we were women, and, as she said, "women are clean." And we were only allowed to keep our cat because she was clean, as my landlady noticed when she petted Maggie's smooth orange and white fur.

I soon noticed that her sense of cleanliness pervaded her moral ideology. During several disturbing conversations I had with my new landlady, she asked me why I was living on my own at such a young age. Though I was about 23, I still looked like a teenager. It was also odd to her, and my other landlords, that I didn't work full-time; I was home most of the day working on my graduate studies and teaching part-time. (I have always had a hard time explaining the academic life). I tried to explain my idea of independence to her. Maybe I said something about not getting along with my parents. Maybe I mentioned the convenience of the commute to the city. It isn't important what I said. I never really answered her questions satisfactorily. She kept returning back to my family. She didn't seem to understand why I wasn't living with my family if I wasn't married. There were only two choices for women in her mind: being a wife or being a daughter. I appeared as neither. Because I didn't quite fit into her established social order, I was considered an anomaly. In her study of single women in Finland, Tuula Gordon invents the term, "city-single" to describe the modern career woman.¹ She reminds us that "women who are not married still cause some confusion by being difficult to categorize . . .

¹ Tuula Gordon. "Single Women and Familism: Challenge from the Margins." The European Journal of Women's Studies. 1 (1994): 165-182. Gordon uses the marginalized single woman to challenge New Right ideology which emphasizes gender difference and biological determinism: "By looking at single women we find out more about possibilities and limitations framing women negotiating full *social* citizenship" (165-66).

Marriage is represented as the most normal commonplace way of organizing one's life" (165).

What seemed to bother Mrs. M. most was my sexual freedom. Since I lived without the protection of either a husband or father, I was available to all men. I was unmarked: there was no sign of my being the property of anyone. The fact that I was forbidden to have male guests stay over certainly is telling. Here it was 1990, and I was encountering the same attitude that Joyce Johnson encountered in the 1950s: I was assumed to be a "loose" woman. The fact that I was able to support myself and attend graduate school was considered shameful, not a mark of female independence. I was even eyed with suspicion. When I spoke to the teenage son of the Korean couple, I felt his parents' eyes on me. My position was defined by my sexuality. It shouldn't have surprised me, then, when the strange old man from downstairs knocked on my door several times in a drunken rage in his underwear demanding sex.

Just as a single woman's reputation in eighteenth-century sentimental novels was always at risk, my reputation was in question during an incident which prompted my sister and I to move out. I came home from work one day to discover that our apartment was robbed, a fate common to first-floor apartments in New York City. Apparently only our apartment was robbed, and no one who was home upstairs heard or saw anything. When my sister noticed some of our stuff in the apartment on the third floor, we accused the Lebanese brothers for the robbery, and the police confronted them. Of course, they denied it. But I was not prepared for their retaliatory accusations that I was an untrustworthy character because they had seen different men come to my door. I suddenly became aware of just how I had been constructed by others. Luckily the police didn't believe them, but I still had to go through the humiliating process of explaining to them that the Lebanese were probably referring to my brother, my cousins and other family members. While some of what I said was true, I exaggerated the family connection in order to distance myself from

my sexuality. I laughed to myself as I recalled the men who may have come to my door: there was the study group one summer with two male graduate students and a small group of men and women I was working with for a class project that often met at my apartment. Then there was my former neighbor from my previous apartment, who was probably the most suspicious looking one because he was an older, Punjabi man, one of the city's lonely, lost souls. Of course, there was my boyfriend who did sleep over occasionally despite the ban on male guests. But that was it. Nothing unusual worth noting. Yet, in their eyes, I was a prostitute; or at least as dishonest, unclean, and immoral as one. I think I've always been entangled in this virgin/whore dichotomy, being raised Roman Catholic and expected to worship the Virgin, yet rebelling in my sexual activity. I recognized that with these two options women are defined by their sexuality. In the following poem written when I was 18 or 19, I do not identify with prostitutes, but because I occupied their space I felt I could have been constructed as a prostitute. I remember feeling very angry at heterosexual men for viewing me as a sexual object, as someone always ready to serve their sexual needs which was evident in the way they addressed me and catcalled. In some ways it reflects my own guilty sexuality, and in other ways it expresses my fear of being labelled a prostitute:

Second Avenue Subway Stop

She walks up slimy stairs
which have always had that
dead gray matte finish.

And runs quickly by the
slick pimps with shiny shoes
who leer and gaze hungrily
at her flesh.

She's afraid they'll think she's
a prostitute and ask for
their earnings and

she'd have to meet their bloodshot
eyes swelling with cheap wine

and listen to their ineffectual
mumblings during throaty garblings
and she'd have to smell their
vomit and see the stained
cloth of the nearby bums
which cover the frayed edges of their humanity.

She knows they see women
solely as whores
serving them for life--
not always a sexual bondage.

Because she is a woman
and knows their caws and whistles
are thrown at her.

She is violated.

Over the years I have come to realize, from the experience of hanging out in impoverished areas, like the Lower East Side, where strung-out prostitutes stood on the corners by the subway, and from my former landlady, that there is a fine line between the respectable woman and the prostitute, an observation that inspired my interest in the image of the fallen woman in British women's writing. This dissertation attempts to explain how that line is constructed and deconstructed in works by British women novelists of the late-eighteenth century. Though the conversation with my landlady has long since been over, I have been trying to answer her all these years.

I bring my personal experiences, like those described above, to my readings of Julia (1790) by Helen Maria Williams, The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796) by Mary Hays, The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment (1798) by Mary Wollstonecraft, Adeline Mowbray: or, The Mother and Daughter (1805) by Amelia Opie, and The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties (1814) by Frances Burney. I see moments of my life flash by in the actions and words of Julia Clifford, Emma Courtney, Maria Venables, Adeline Mowbray, Elinor Joddrel and Juliet Granville. Interestingly, though I come from a family of working-class, Italian-Americans, I always identify with these British heroines of

more privileged social status. The conflicts I experienced while forming my independent sexual identity, in resistance to conventional gender roles, to the patriarchal authority of my father and the Catholic church, and to the roles determined by my ethnicity and class, parallel the contradictions faced by the fictional women (and even their authors) of the late-eighteenth century who are studied in this dissertation. I was drawn to the economic, political, psychological and social implications of sexuality for women in the late-eighteenth century because I was attracted to the possibility of finding meaningful answers for my own life. In this dissertation I try to answer my former landlady's questions about why I lived without my family and why I wasn't married, and I answer questions Mrs. M. never raised about the politics of female work, and the significance of class in the construction of female independence and female sexuality, and female friendship.

In writing this dissertation, I have discovered much about the sticky process of literary interpretation, especially for texts of this period, and I have gained a richer sense of the intricate perplexities of plot. Long before I began writing this dissertation, I was once told by a professor that it was important to love, honor, and respect the writer(s) you write a book about. Remembering his advice, I wrote about women with whom I feel connected, about whom I felt enthusiastic writing, in whom I had a genuine interest and admiration of: women who had the courage to transgress the strict codes of female propriety to give us stories of female independence that are profoundly inspiring to women two centuries later.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of five feminist novels written by women during a volatile period in English history when gender and class ideologies came under question: Julia (1790), by Helen Maria Williams; The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), by Mary Hays; The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment (1798), by Mary Wollstonecraft; Adeline Mowbray: or, The Mother and Daughter (1805), by Amelia Opie; and The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties (1814), by Frances Burney. While some of these novels are only regaining recognition in the 1990s, they all attracted attention at the time of their publication, being reviewed in the major journals, and eliciting vehement attacks by many contemporary critics.

Though these novels are usually placed within certain traditions of Romanticism and the eighteenth-century novel, I argue that their significant deviations from these traditions demonstrate why they merit a full study and why I am purposely limiting my study to a few exemplary radical British women writers of the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Hays, Opie and Williams. Although her appearance in this study may seem unusual, Frances Burney is grouped together with these women writers for the feminism that saturates her 1814 novel which is clearly a response to the 1790s debates, and for many other reasons discussed in the section on her in Part III of this introduction. Whereas prominent studies of women writers of the 1790s claim that women's novels of the eighteenth century must be understood within the didactic-moral tradition of conduct books and courtesy literature, I believe these novels reflect a distinctly feminist response to the historical political situation and the gender ideology of the late-eighteenth century. Their purpose is not to teach, but to provide powerful commentary on women's place in contemporary social, political, and economic arrangements. As I explain later, the increasing prosperity and power of certain segments of the middle class enabled them to

influence cultural constructs of womanhood, restricting women to a domestic ideal. Our women writers respond as feminists to these limited roles, enacting resistance, and redefining womanhood. For one, these novels do not reproduce culturally approved forms of desire, but revolutionize the very idea of female desire. They comprise a unique subdivision of the novel that is formed during this time of revolutionary activity, capturing the hopes and fears of a generation, and more importantly, of women. I define this subdivision more thoroughly in a later section.

I argue that this group of novels revises our understanding of women's novels and the liberal feminist movement. Because the post-revolutionary years witness a "backlash" against feminism, unabashedly aimed at Mary Wollstonecraft, we can read the novels that appear throughout the nineteenth century as responses to these feminist novels. I believe these four authors and novels are sources of that backlash and, thus, occupy a central position in our understanding of both the influence of liberal feminism and the reasons a later generation sought to suppress it. Burney's The Wanderer is one example of how feminist ideas became absorbed by an otherwise conservative novelist in a later generation. Later women writers who wanted success without paying the price of their propriety usually wanted to distance themselves from the feminists, especially Wollstonecraft. Though Burney employs a minor character, Elinor Joddrel, to ridicule feminists like Wollstonecraft and to distance herself from them, the novel supports many of Wollstonecraft's ideas. My study also contributes to our understanding of liberal feminism with my investigation into class identity which I believe provides new ways of reading late-eighteenth century texts and women's novels. In my introduction to Part Three, I define liberal feminism more thoroughly. As middle-class women like our four authors and their heroines came to define the feminist movement, they transgressed gender and class boundaries, becoming "fallen" women who closely identified with working-class women who were also unprotected, unfeminine in the middle-class domestic sense, and self-

reliant, social outcasts. Left without the “protection” of male figures like their fathers, brothers, or husbands, these women testify to the possibility of female independence, and of forming self-protection.¹ Our middle-class heroines lose their class status and rely upon working-class women for models of independence. The special relationships between our heroines and their domestic servants are treated in my last chapter in which they are identified as “redemptive” friendships, stabilizing the class identity of each woman. Instead of collapsing class identity to support female solidarity within the movement as these feminists do, I insist on analyzing class differences for I believe class conflict is much more complex than feminists have imagined, an argument I address more fully in the methodology section below. Because of their complexity, theories of social class are treated separately in that section. These novels appear in literary history as sparks igniting the flame of feminism, flickering momentarily before being smothered, but from whose ashes Burney writes her novel.

In the following sections, I describe the ways in which these novels draw from and deviate from women’s literary traditions, marking their historical place. I conclude Part One of the Introduction with my multilayered thesis for the novels that centers on transgressive women: the rebellious heroines, working-class women, and the prostitute, each representing ways in which women could resist the dominant gender ideology. Part Two: Methodology explores critical approaches, defines social class, and outlines each chapter. Part Three: The Authors and their Novels is devoted to the common ties the authors had, includes relevant biographical material on each woman, and covers the publication and reception history of each novel under study.

¹ I answer Burney’s Juliet’s question, “What is woman unprotected?” (344) in the introduction to Chapter 1.

PART ONE: THE FEMINIST NOVEL OF THE 1790s AND WOMEN'S LITERARY TRADITIONS

Feminist Novels and Women's Literary Traditions

These novels enrich our understanding of the feminist movement of the 1790s and provide new ways of reading women's novels. Although these novels form a minor tradition that did not dominate literary tastes of the time, they are valued for their critique of dominant cultural and literary customs. In this section I discuss how this dissertation finds a place for these novels and these women writers in literary history.

In major literary studies such as those by Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey, women's novels are usually located within the didactic-moral tradition in which women presented lessons for "proper" feminine behavior, reproduced their culture's gender ideology, and reflected "the rise of the domestic woman." Thus, according to Armstrong and Poovey, I should read these novels as part of a tradition in which women's writing derived from the didactic-moral tradition of conduct books. However, most literary studies have a tendency to overlook these political novels of the 1790s and to dismiss Burney's novel as worthless, as did her contemporary critics. As my central thesis, I identify these novels within a tradition of protest in women's novels in which the domestic ideology is resisted and the domestic woman is redefined.

In these novels, we see a deviation from certain literary traditions in women's novels. Ann H. Jones claims that novels with "reformed heroines" (coquettes-turned-dutiful-wives) were the central women's tradition in the eighteenth century. In such novels, women learned to correct their "feminine" faults and to accept male authority rather than protest it. A woman writer's popularity, respectability, and influence depended upon her following this tradition. By reinforcing women's limited domestic roles, instead of transgressing them, women writers, Hannah More for example, were perceived as less

threatening. Similarly, when female novelists aligned their work with the tradition of moral didacticism, or subscribed to the status quo, they gained “respectability.” However, women writers were then limited to few fictional strategies and subject matters. For example, according to Betty Rizzo, “one of the most important, perhaps *the* most important, unbroachable subject for women of the period [1750s-1770s] was their desire for equality in marriage” (22).

Of course, women were discouraged from pursuing profit and popularity through publication; public attention was considered “unfeminine.” Therefore, they had to justify their position as *women* writers. In Prefaces and Advertisements to their novels, women writers frequently write modestly about their abilities as authors, often denigrating their own work and apologizing for writing it. Mary Hays was reprimanded by her mentor, Mary Wollstonecraft, for writing such a preface. Wollstonecraft told Hays quite bluntly that “Disadvantages of education &c ought, in my opinion, never to be pleaded (with the public) in excuse for defects of any importance . . . This kind of vain humility has ever disgusted me . . . your male friends will still treat you like a woman . . .” (Wardle 219). Hays seems to have revised her preface to Letter and Essays extensively for she even refers to Wollstonecraft in it and announces only one apology for the limitations in women’s education. Hays was clearly concerned about staying within the acceptable boundaries of female behavior until Wollstonecraft encouraged her to step outside such boundaries. In this minor example, we clearly see the extent to which gender preoccupied women writers and why certain women writers transgressed the boundaries restricting women writers’ styles.

The increasing homogenization of women’s identity with the domestic sphere during the eighteenth century led to fewer acceptable alternatives. If women writers violated codes of propriety by working for economic independence, having desire, choosing lovers, resisting class attitudes, wanting independence from patriarchy, or

portraying heroines who did, they were considered whores. Indeed, they centered their version of womanhood on a fulfilled sexuality, not chastity, in direct opposition to domestic ideology. In contrast, if such violations were enacted by women like Hannah More, they maintained their “safe” reputation by reinforcing women’s roles and promoting chastity. Burney gained respectability as a novelist not only because she wrote earlier novels within the dominant female tradition, but because she governed her life with propriety. To this day, women who push feminist agendas continue to risk sully their reputations. Although both Barbara Dole and Hillary Clinton made similar choices in their lives to work professionally as lawyers and support their politically-ambitious husbands, most Americans react negatively to Clinton. Yet, Clinton chose motherhood and fulfilled many traditional female roles which Dole distinctly rejected. Americans appear to be offended by Hillary Clinton’s aggressiveness, independence, and feminism, whereas they find Dole’s sweet, docile nature, and promotion of conservative roles for women less threatening. Of course, if we turn back two hundred years, we can substitute Wollstonecraft for Clinton and More for Dole.

Inscribed within the unstable boundaries between genres and genders was the blurred boundary between the “proper Lady” and the prostitute, icons of gender-appropriate and gender-transgressive behavior. Richard Polwhele’s poem, “The Unsex’d Females,” which divides women writers into two camps, one properly feminine group led by the moralist Hannah More and the other “unsex’d” group led by Mary Wollstonecraft, reveals the extent to which critics identified two opposing traditions of women’s writing. Polwhele defines “unsex’d” women, like Helen Maria Williams and Mary Hays, as those who do not follow orthodox codes of female behavior and are political radicals. In his example of Williams, he focuses on her deviation from traditional gender roles, linking her politics with sexual misconduct: “[she] is, doubtless, a true poet. But is it not extraordinary, that such a genius, a female and so young, should have become a politician .

. . that [she] should stand forward, an intemperate advocate for Gallic licentiousness . . .” (19). Polwhele’s generous attention to Wollstonecraft’s sexual nonconformism helps us see that, in Claudia Johnson’s words: “What being an unsexed female entails for the defenders of established order, then, is indulging in unbounded heterosexual activity without the heterosexual sentiment, particularly as mediated through modesty, that conduces to the development of tractable, forbearing, and caring political subjects” (*Equivocal* 9). Thanks to Godwin’s *Memoirs* of his famous wife, Polwhele had ample material to equate Wollstonecraft’s intellectual transgression with her sexual transgression.

Our women writers boldly correct a tradition of women’s writing that preserved the status quo and accepted subordinate roles for women. By refusing and redefining “proper” behavior, they daringly deviate from this more conservative style in order to present their feminist philosophies on gender roles, female sexuality, and class conflict. Though they took many risks and suffered many terrible consequences for doing so, our writers are rewarded with the acknowledgement that this dissertation makes of their contribution to women’s literary history as feminists. They remind us to step outside of dominant discourses on gender and class ideology to hear their voices on the margin.

Recent studies by scholars such as Susan Fraiman, Claudia Johnson, Gary Kelly, Anne Mellor, and Janet Todd recognize the complexity of the two opposing camps of women’s writing, sometimes referred to as Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin, or conservative and radical. They point to the instability of these categories in order to fit “conservative” novels into a radical women’s literary tradition, uncovering subversive strategies used to obscure signs of protest in women’s fiction such as parallel plots and doubling. Johnson, for example, reads Austen within this context. Similarly, Rizzo reads women’s condemnation of the hierarchical “mistress-companion” relationship as a critique of marriage which was taboo. Women writers were compelled to employ these deceptive techniques because they were concerned with propriety and risked losing their reputations and readership. While

this method of explicating contradictory narrative movements that render textual meanings ambiguous explains women's literary strategies, my approach differs by examining texts which explicitly introduce subversive material. These women writers transgressed literary and gender boundaries when they transformed the sentimental plot of domestic fiction into a vehicle for their dangerous ideas about women, sexuality, marriage, and class relationships, crossing into the exclusively masculine fields. As texts which are explicitly ideological, and confessed by their authors to be composed in response to contemporary social and political issues, these novels are reliable sources of reformist thought about gender ideology. Because of their obvious commitment to women's rights, these women writers seem appropriate for an investigation into the social construction of gender and class. With the exception of Burney, each woman identified herself as radical and publicly avowed her political affiliations. My choice of these five novels, and my rejection of others, was guided by the engagement with liberal feminist thought, the heroines' type of conflict, the treatment of class identity, and the themes and tropes present in each which override conventional generic boundaries.

Tradition of Protest

In contrast to Armstrong and Poovey, I believe these novels, nearly all of which are usually recognized as "Jacobin" novels, should be placed more appropriately in a tradition of protest amongst women writers stemming from the seventeenth century when writers such as Aphra Behn, Delarivere Manley, Mary Astell, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and others rose to prominence. Jane Spencer, in her study of eighteenth-century women novelists, traces a tradition of protest against unfair sexual conventions throughout the eighteenth century:

In the early years erotic seduction-scenes caught popular taste, and were used by [Delarivere] Manley and [Eliza] Haywood to criticize masculine

attitudes. Later, as greater refinement in bourgeois society required greater delicacy of novelists and their heroines, erotic scenes were dropped and heroines remained unsullied. Seduction was relegated to the margins, to be re-centralized and treated more radically by the revolutionary writers at the end of the century. . . . Their feminist message was often compromised, especially in the late-century sentimental novel, by the convention of natural feminine innocence. Yet, by criticizing mercenary marriage, parental pressure on the daughter's choice, the double standard, and the equation of a woman's virtue with her reputation, they contributed to a tradition of protest which remained alive, though subdued, after the eclipse of the more radical analyses offered by the feminists at the end of the century. (137)

Susan Fraiman also uncovers what she terms "dissident tracks" in women's writing of this period, particularly in conduct literature. Like Fraiman, I believe that Armstrong's and Poovey's depiction of the single, unifying voice of the middle class in conduct literature is misleading. Fraiman's analysis of the literature presents conflicts and contradictions about female formation. In particular, she finds that the "Mentoria narrative," stories in which women strive for the intellectual attainments from which they were traditionally excluded, disrupts the conventional conduct book approach.² Similarly, these novels deviate from the tradition of women's novels that reproduced the values of the middle-class conduct books.

Feminism, Jacobinism, and the Post-Revolutionary "Backlash"

Although these novels also occupy an important place in literary history as Jacobin novels which appear almost exclusively in the 1790s and are grouped together because of

² Mentoria (1778) is the title of Ann Murry's conduct book discussed in Fraiman, pp. 23-31. Fraiman finds the Mentoria narrative in George Eliot's The Mill on The Floss.

their political philosophy, I distinguish them even from this category by focusing on gender. While such Jacobin novels as Godwin's Caleb Williams and those by Thomas Holcroft were sensitive to women's oppression, women do not occupy a central place in their novels. Though I do not treat these novels as part of the Jacobin tradition, I certainly recognize the influence of English Jacobinism in four of our authors's works and their feminism which stems primarily from their engagement with Dissent. Burney's novel is not referred to as Jacobin, nor was Burney a Jacobin.

The radical discourse of English Jacobinism was not new to most of these women writers: each was nurtured in the tradition of radical Dissent. Amelia Opie, for example, was born and raised in Norwich, which had a large and influential Corresponding Society in the 1790s.³ Opie's grandfather was a dissenting minister, and her father was involved in Norwich's hotbed of radicalism. Dr. Alderson, his daughter, Amelia, and their friends were ready to emigrate to America if radical leaders, Thomas Hardy, Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall were convicted for treason; each of their trials captivated the country's interest in 1794 (Brightwell 50; Thompson 135-6). It is well-known that Wollstonecraft met Dr. Priestley and other Dissenters from Newington Green when she set up her school there. Early in her life, Williams became a Dissenter.⁴ Mary Hays descended from a family with a long tradition in Rational Dissent and appears to have associated only with Dissenters. At 19, she fell in love with a young Dissenter, John Eccles who died before

³ Corresponding Societies were founded in the early 1790s as political organizations whose lower middle-class and artisan members' top priority was Parliamentary Reform and who supported "Painite" rights. Members paid dues which went towards the correspondence with similar groups in the country. The London Corresponding Society was founded in March, 1792 and presided over by Thomas Hardy, who would be accused of treason for this political activity and the subject of one of the most celebrated trials in the 1790s. For the history of Corresponding Societies, see E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class, especially pp. 17-21.

⁴ Ironically, though Helen Maria Williams supported the French Revolution, she aligned herself with the Girondists, not the Jacobins.

they could marry. She became friends with Robert Robinson, a Baptist preacher who introduced her to some prominent dissenters including Dr. Joseph Priestley. Hays also attended lectures and meetings of the Rational Dissenters at Unitarian New College at Hackney and wrote a pamphlet in 1791 defending the dissenting tradition of worship which led to her meeting with more radical dissenters such as George Dyer and Joseph Johnson's intellectual circle. She fell in love with one of them: a prominent Cambridge dissenter, William Frend (Luria 5-8), an unfulfilling experience which led to the production of The Memoirs of Emma Courtney.

There is a long and varied tradition of Dissent in England stemming from the Glorious Revolution. In the late seventeenth century, religious sects, Independents, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Quakers, and Baptists broke off from the Established Church. Thompson claims these groups "became less zealous and more prosperous" as toleration increased (26). However, because Dissenters were barred from holding public office, they fought for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts throughout the 1790s. Moreover, "the Dissenters continued throughout the century to work for civil and religious liberties" (Thompson 27). They upheld democratic principles: "Dissenting sects often carried the principles of self-government and of local autonomy to the borders of anarchy" (Thompson 28). From the tradition of Dissent, our four authors absorbed powerfully-charged language and radical ideas. They learned early in their lives to act against the grain, to embrace the political activity of English Jacobinism, to promote feminism, and to support the French Revolution.

"Jacobinism" originally referred to the beliefs held by supporters of the French Revolution, but by the end of the eighteenth-century, Jacobinism was associated with almost any deviation from orthodox views and with any form of political critique. Because the English government feared a revolution like the one across the Channel, measures were taken to suppress Jacobin expression, written materials, and organizations. By 1799,

when the Anti-Jacobin Review was set up, it became clear that the dominant view in English society was not supportive of French principles of equality. In order to discredit feminist voices, anti-feminists labelled any novel as Jacobin that threatened to disrupt social orders, especially in the late 1790s. In addition, looking at the example of Wollstonecraft, they associated feminists with sexual license, and even prostitution.

The years following the publication of these novels were marked by a “revival of moral reform, paternal authority, and sexual repression . . . With this reassertion of patriarchal authority in the early nineteenth century, the status of women inevitably declined, despite the hollow blast on the trumpet of female liberation by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792” (Stone 666; 67). Though we see this “backlash” against feminism in the public condemnation of Burney’s 1814 novel, we certainly should not call the gender ideology constructed by feminists in the 1790s a “hollow blast.” Burney’s decision to publish a feminist novel in 1814 was not only brave, but strong evidence that Wollstonecraft’s ideas still echoed. In the 1790s, her novel would not have attracted such negative attention and would have been seen as a contribution to the feminist movement. But in 1814, her novel was ridiculed as out-dated for addressing the then-irrelevant woman’s question.

In some convincing ways, these four novels may be seen as failures of the feminist movement because they seem to have done little to stem the tide of moral reformism and domestic ideology, though they were published during a flourishing of feminist thought and activity. On the other hand, they may have delayed the inevitable dominance of these middle-class values for about a decade. Though feminism, along with Jacobinism, may have lost its momentum, being pushed underground, it clearly emerges not only in Burney’s novel, but in women’s writings in the nineteenth century. Burney’s novel occupies an important place in our consideration of the influence of these feminist novels. While it appears that feminist writing disappeared or was successfully suppressed, only a

thorough examination of Victorian novels would demonstrate the extent to which dissenting voices continued to be heard. Indeed, it would be reductive to assume a total abandonment of feminist thought.

In other ways, each of our authors' treatment of class identity in their novels reveals the extent to which each continued her commitment to Jacobin principles. When our middle and upper class heroines identify with and form households with working-class women, the subject of Chapter Five, our authors recognize the usefulness of a solidarity which had been formed in the early stages of working-class activity to which the radical segments of the middle-class were aligned. I discuss the history of this early class alliance in the section on the middle classes in "Social Class" (Part Three: Methodology) and in Chapter Five.

Genre

I have chosen the genre of the novel primarily because it is recognized as a dominantly female genre.⁵ We know, historically, that women writers prospered in this genre. Janet Todd's Dictionary covers hundreds of women writing novels between 1660 and 1800. Moreover, I have chosen the novel because of its special capacity to address feminist issues. As Janet Todd informs us: "An extraordinary feature of literature of all types in the 1790s is its political nature . . . Almost all genres were politicised in some way, while the choice of genre became a political statement itself and each fictional plot and literary device had some implications" (Sign 224). Similarly, Claudia Johnson writes, in reference to Mary Wollstonecraft's Wrongs, that "The choice in genre is important, for writing novels inevitably entails the representation of sexual difference" (Equivocal 47).

⁵ Many critics argue that women dominated the genre of the novel during this time. See Mary Poovey, "Mary Wollstonecraft," Irene Tayler and Gina Luria, "Gender and Genre," and Janet Todd, Dictionary, p. 18.

Gary Kelly claims that “the urgency of producing a Revolutionary feminist novel was increasing” in the mid-1790s amidst the political and social crises and the suppression of dissenting voices (Revolutionary 206). Thus, historical, social, ideological, and political forces opened a space for the production of the feminist texts under study to which Burney responded over a decade later.

As I established earlier in this introduction, these are “political” novels, distinguished by their liberal feminist projections. B. J. MacCarthy reminds us that “Every literary means was employed to drive home the principles of justice, and the novel, because of its popular appeal, was regarded as an excellent means of propaganda” (420). Many eighteenth century critics and even twentieth century scholars casually dismiss such novels because they assume that either the propaganda or the art suffers. My project recuperates these novels for what I consider their successful blend of politics in domestic fiction creating, in fact, an entirely new category of literature.

Thesis for the Novels: Transgressive Women

The virtuous-fallen woman who appears as a central figure in all of these novels represents a deviation from two major literary traditions of heroines: the sentimental heroine, and the seduced maiden. My oxymoronic term, “virtuous-fallen” codifies the dominant gender ideology, our heroine’s resistance to their “fallen” identity, their rewriting of womanhood, and the instability of the boundaries between both types of female behavior that center on female sexuality. This dissertation is organized around these issues and profiles the various types of resistance our heroines enact to marriage customs, gender roles, and class attitudes.

What each of the novels under study has in common is the image of the virtuous woman in distress, threatened by powerful social forces to “fall,” or to transgress the boundaries of encoded female propriety. I concur with G. J. Barker-Benfield’s assertion

that “the distress women suffered was derived from the fact that they operated in a world dominated by men” (313). But, my understanding of the causes of distress differs from Barker-Benfield’s who claims “one of the best-known representations of the literature of sensibility is the figure of ‘virtue in distress,’ the virtue a woman’s, her distress caused by a man” (xviii). Her distress differs greatly from the conventional eighteenth-century sentimental heroines because her “distress” is not attributed merely to a rake, a seducer, or a man, for that matter, but to social causes: they are the unfair biases against women in patriarchal social relationships, in the English legal system, in England’s political position, in its capitalist system, in the lack of educational and employment opportunities available for women, and in the dominant gender ideology. Like novelists of sensibility, feminists employ this distinctly female image in order to heighten awareness of women’s oppression. However, in the novels under study, our authors do not restrict “virtue” in distress to the middle and upper classes, but extend this image to working-class women and sexually-transgressive women. Domestic servants such as Hays’s Rachel, Opie’s Savanna, and Wollstonecraft’s Jemima are virtuous women in distress. Moreover, Mary Ann Radcliffe calls prostitutes “distressed females” and tells her readers “nothing is more conspicuous in the eyes of the world, than the distresses of women.” Thus, by claiming working-class women and prostitutes as “virtue in distress,” our novelists revise this tradition of sensibility.

My use of the terms “virtuous” and “distress” also differs greatly from R. F. Brissenden’s in his well-known study of sentimentalism in the novel, Virtue in Distress. Brissenden identifies the “uncomfortable and increasingly embarrassing gap between the benevolent moral theories of the enlightenment and the social reality in which they were supposed to operate” as the “distress” which affects “virtue” (77). The benevolent, rational person feels hopelessly impotent and ineffective in the face of social evils like poverty. Though Brissenden extends his definitions to women, he constructs “virtue” as primarily

masculine--his "dislocated, deracinated, powerless artist" is a male Romantic figure (76). These gender differences cannot be disregarded. In this tradition, the solitary male is exalted, endowed with supreme gifts of sensitivity, sublime aestheticism, and pointed intelligence, while, I find, the solitary female is embarrassing, shameful, and dismissed as aberrant, immoral, defeminized, and disease-ridden. Brissenden's work is valuable for an understanding of the masculinist Romantic tradition of the solitary figure and the anguished artist, but it overlooks the tradition of women's writing that I am studying, and, in fact, mentions few women writers with the exception of Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen.

As virtuous, but fallen, women in distress, my heroines can also be understood within, but deviating from, the eighteenth-century tradition of what Susan Staves calls "the pathetic seduced maiden." In this tradition, "young women of previously fair fame . . . are persuaded to consent to illicit intercourse . . . The pathos of the seduced maiden depends upon her being a modest girl who strenuously resists invitations to illicit intercourse, yielding only after a protracted siege and under otherwise extraordinary circumstances" (Staves 114; 115). The seducers of these simple girls are usually of greater social status and, thus, social power and authority. Seduced maidens are restricted to a particular class in which women are expected to possess "those virtues the culture especially prized in young women: beauty, simplicity (or ignorance, to call it a harsher name), trustfulness, and affectionateness" (118). Their less refined, lusty sisters were not deserving objects of pathos. While the seduced maiden's active role indicates the existence of her free will to some extent, Staves claims that the consequences are perceived to belong not only to the daughter, but to her father or family as well.

In contrast, the authors under study redefine seduction and place free will entirely in the hands of young, sexually active women, with the exception of Burney. They are on equal terms, both intellectually and socially, with their lovers, and live independently from their families who are disassociated from their "disgrace." In fact, as Wollstonecraft's

heroine, Maria Venables, denies the charge of seduction at her lover's adultery trial, so do our feminist authors abandon seduction scenes with seduced maidens for scenes of sophisticated, virtuous women choosing their own lovers. Though they are perceived by society as seduced women, or whores even, these women vigorously fight for the right to romantic love. They are what society calls "fallen," but they are not seduced. Adeline Mowbray, for example, insists to one of her neighbors that she was not "betrayed" by Frederic Glenmurray, her lover, but that "from a conviction of the folly of marriage, I have preferred living with him without the performance of a ceremony which, in the eye of reason, can confer neither honour nor happiness" (II: 113). Her neighbor realizes that Adeline is not "the poor victim of passion and persuasion," but a "wilful offender" (II: 114-15). Burney addresses the problem of female sexuality in her novel in a very different way. Though her heroine's sexual behavior does not resemble the other four, Juliet is a transgressive figure because of her unstable class identity and does have desire for a man whom she eventually marries. Elinor Joddrel, however, who publicly pronounces her sexual desire, behaves similarly to our other heroines.

What also distinguishes these five novels is that the virtuous-fallen woman takes a central place in the story for the first time in the history of women's novels. This focus is what also influenced my choice of texts. For example, I did not include Charlotte Smith's Emmeline (1788) because its sexually-transgressive woman, Lady Adelina Trelawney, is relegated to the margins of the main plot.

The transgressive woman is the focus of my study. She is 1) the Wollstonecraftian woman self-creating her class status and independence without family or marriage; 2) the laboring woman of the working class defying the middle-class domestic ideal; 3) the prostitute. For the first time, these three "types" are united together in a literary study. As social "outcasts," "unprotected" women, "unsex'd" females, and what I call "placeless," figures, each powerfully represents the marginalized nature of the female subject. In my

analysis of these figures, I demonstrate that the boundary between the ideal woman and the fallen woman was much more unstable than has been previously understood. In this study, I also claim that from the unique subject positions of these fictional characters, these feminist authors dramatically revise the cultural meaning of womanhood and heterosexual relationships, and insert reformist ideas about class relations and social structures into their novels. I devote the next few pages to each of these three types, demonstrating their significant links, why they are grouped together, and how they succeed in transforming women's status.

The revolutionary, rational, New Woman, remarkable for her intellectual strength, independence, fortitude, outspokenness, firm principles, and sexuality undercuts the exemplary woman, characterized by feminine delicacy, "natural" inferiorities, modesty, and chastity. She critiques woman's subordinate social position and dependence on men and patriarchal institutions for her class status and for protection, preferring the model of healthy interdependence between women. Each novel depicts a young woman who desires and achieves independence in a restrictive, gendered society, while encountering the "difficulties" of her sex and of sexuality. These heroines argue strongly against marriage customs that devalue women's experience, social customs that inhibit women's intellectual abilities and emotional needs, and legal discourse that discourages women's social participation, among many other issues. Through their sexuality and their desire for independence, they do not conform to middle-class gender roles, nor do they conform to middle-class attitudes toward domestic servants, prostitutes, and other members of the working classes.

Each woman interrogates the choices allowed to women of all classes. In each of these novels we can trace a quest for self-definition in the heroine's life. In The Wanderer, Julia, The Memoirs of Emma Courtney, and Adeline Mowbray, the female protagonists achieve a moment of self-realization that enables them to begin constructing their own

subjectivities. In Mary Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman, it is Maria's confinement in a madhouse and the memoirs that she writes there that lead to a self-evaluation. These self-constructed identities are in conflict with customary roles of the female sex and each heroine voices explicitly feminist statements challenging the sexual prejudices of society. Our heroines read prodigiously, write passionately, work to earn wages and speak up during dinner conversations, each time breaking through gender boundaries. They are active participants in their social world, not silent and sacrificing servants to others. Thus, each author theorizes the social construction of woman and dismantles traditional gender roles inscribed in the dominant domestic ideology.

At significant moments in each novel, the heroine is left physically outside of familial or social orders. Ruth Perry's assertion that "there was no place in this urban society for a woman outside her father's home or her husband's home" is validated by these young women's experiences (40). The feelings of loneliness, alienation, frustration, and despair felt by these women writers come directly to us through their female characters. It is not surprising that their distressed heroines identify with the most obvious outcasts of society: the working-class woman and the prostitute. Each novel critiques class boundaries, and, with the exception of Burney's novel, form all-female households with outcast women. Though Burney's novel is the only one which ends with a happy heterosexual marriage, she vividly depicts the complexity of working-class culture to an even greater extent than Wollstonecraft.

While studies of these writers' works by feminist scholars triumphantly celebrate their representation of feminist heroines, as I do here, most of them do not pay much attention to the women of the lower classes, another type of transgressive woman. Though I center my study on the privileged heroines, I also focus on working-class women and the common ties they share with the heroines. By examining the representation of working-class women, in particular, domestic servants, milliners, and prostitutes, and the heroines'

relationships with the working class, I uncover the crucial importance of class difference to their identities and to the liberal feminist movement. For example, while our heroines reject the notion of seduction, our working-class women continue to be victim to rape and seduction, as the examples of Jemima, Rachel, and Flora Pierson show.

I consider the working-class woman separately from the heroine and the whore, although she is entangled in those subjectivities, because she plays an important role in the heroine's self-creation. Forging their class identities on their own, our heroines borrow models of independence from working-class women. They can, in fact, become members of the working class, an argument I make for Juliet Granville in Burney's The Wanderer. (Burney's novel is treated separately in Chapter Four for its attention to class identity). At the same time that such a fall would indicate a loss of class status, our heroines' attempts at independence enable them to form a secure middle-class identity that is not dependent upon men, marriage, or family for such status. In my last chapter, I focus on the relationship between the heroines and their working-class friends, identifying them uniquely as "redemptive" friendships. Each redeems the other in order to stabilize their status, defining each other interdependently, not in opposition or conflict. In Chapter Five I introduce some of the working-class servants for the first time in the dissertation: Mrs. Meynell in Williams's Julia, Rachel in Hays's Emma Courtney, Mary Warner and Savanna in Adeline Mowbray. In addition, Wollstonecraft's Jemima, who is one of the most thorough and realistic portrayals of a working-class woman in literature of this period, receives special attention throughout this dissertation.

At the same time that working-class women demonstrate the relationship between women's sexual transgression and economic marginality, the prostitute embodies this connection. Because both working-class women and middle-class women who wanted to work were not only viewed as prostitutes, but threatened with prostitution, my study includes an analysis of the prostitute of the late-eighteenth century, the third type of

transgressive woman.

The prostitute is located at the center of class and gender conflict. As a member of the working class, she is expected to work and to be sexually available. As a working woman and a sexually exploited woman, she embodies the struggle for woman's rights for which middle-class women were fighting. She represents both the limitations of women's opportunities and the threat of women's independence. According to one historian of prostitutes, Philippa Levine,

[a] woman's identity as prostitute or potential prostitute was constructed *through* resistance. A prostitute woman by definition lived in defiance, in resistance--of the proper sphere of Woman, of the male order, of respectability, exposing the threat of unordered female sexuality which led to the codification of female sexuality. In short, resistance invited containment which prompted resistance--and new definitions were born.
(488)

The site of contestation lies in the body of the sexual woman who defies patriarchal control and demands equal opportunity. Though Wollstonecraft's Jemima is the only character who works as a prostitute, other characters like Opie's Mary Warner are closely aligned with prostitution as kept mistresses, an identity shared with some of our heroines. Even Burney's wanderer who is vulnerable to sexual assault on the roadside walks in the shadow of the prostitute.

Although our fiction relies on symbolism for the most part to suggest these connections, non-fiction and social history from the period distinctly reveal just how close women could come to prostitution. It was a common belief in the late-eighteenth century that a woman's lack of financial support directly caused prostitution. In Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex (1798), Priscilla Wakefield suggests that the single woman or the widow "not unfrequently, if she be young and handsome, is driven by

despair to those paths which lead to infamy.” Therefore, feminists could argue for women’s access to trades and professions. Wakefield introduces the remedies of liberal feminism to save women from prostitution:

Is it not time to find a remedy for such evils, when . . . our streets teem with multitudes of unhappy women, many of whom might have been rescued from their present degradation, or who would perhaps never have *fallen* into it, had they been instructed in the exercise of some art or profession, which would have enabled them to procure for themselves a respectable support by their own industry.

(66-67; my italics)

While Wakefield’s “reflections” explicitly center on the genteel woman, Mary Ann Radcliffe, in “The Female Advocate,” takes the prostitute as her object of study, though she is never named as such.⁶ In her discussion of single, middle-class women left “unprotected,” Radcliffe blurs the distinctions between these women and prostitutes. Moreover, Radcliffe reminds us that her contemporaries do not know what the prostitute suffers or feels because no one has bothered to find out. Though the prostitute is a woman of so little consequence in society, she is the icon of sexual discrimination, double standard, and social prejudices for women, especially working-class women. Concerned with facts and figures, not stereotypes or social custom, Radcliffe’s texts opens up the possibility of “knowing” the prostitute. She demands an investigation that, however, is not made until Henry Mayhew sets out to interview London’s poor in the 1840s. Because of the unstable boundaries between the single woman and the prostitute to which Radcliffe so

⁶ Dale Spender identifies Mary Ann Radcliffe (1745-1810) as a minor writer “poles apart” from the celebrated Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823). Spender shrewdly asserts that the confusion between the two may have been calculated to the publisher’s advantage to boost sales of the former who is responsible for three novels, two of which she is attributed to be the author, and for Radcliffe’s New Novelist’s Pocket Magazine (*Mothers* 235). The latter, of course, composed a total of six novels including the vastly popular The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797).

powerfully alludes, I became convinced of the importance of examining the prostitute's role in discussions of women's condition in the late-eighteenth century, and in novels that emphasize the powerful bond between these women that draws attention to their shared oppression.

Drawing on the work of historian Philippa Levine, who claims that "the existence of female prostitution, however, crucially presented the reality of women at work" (493), I discuss prostitutes as members of the working classes. Class distinguishes the prostitute from the "fallen woman." The prostitute exchanges sexual favors for cash. She may be coerced or seduced into such propositions, but is usually aware of a contract being made. In contrast, the fallen woman is usually a member of the middle or upper classes who strays from her virtuous path of chastity, frequently by seduction, which leads to her fall from her class status, and, according to widespread fears, to descend into infamy--prostitution. One cannot read eighteenth-century sentimental novels without noticing the social status of "fallen" heroines like Clarissa. Once these women from the upper ranks were seduced or went beyond the bounds of female chastity, they began to resemble the historically real prostitute and were treated as such. "Sexualized" like the prostitute, they were socially outcast. This disturbing ideology constructs uncontrolled female sexuality as a threat to social order and closes off the possibility of redemption. Drawing on the social history of the period, I contrast this myth of the unredeemable fallen woman with the actual attitudes of contemporaries. I believe there is a conscious effort on the part of women writers to distinguish between heroines and whores, though they acknowledge the destabilization of each category. Our feminist writers insist that the heroine can be sexually active outside of marriage and not be a whore. Though Burney's heroine remains chaste, with difficulty I might add, she illuminates the ways in which women could not escape their sexual identity. Finally, we can borrow models of redemption from the prostitute. Though the single white females of these novels, our "unprotected" heroines who struggle

to attain economic and emotional independence remarkably resemble the precariously situated, “unprotected,” working-class women who become prostitutes, they have important economic, social, psychological, and historical differences. The heroine may be treated as the whore, but the whore is never the heroine.

PART TWO: METHODOLOGY

Critical Approaches

Though these novels have been studied together elsewhere, this is the first time all these selected texts and authors are brought together for a full-length study. Janet Todd’s ambitious study of eighteenth-century women writers, The Sign of Angellica, includes a chapter on Wollstonecraft and Hays and a chapter on Burney, while she devotes some space to Williams and Opie. Anne Mellor covers each of these novels briefly in Romanticism and Gender. Eleanor Ty’s book, Unsex’d Revolutionaries, includes separate chapters on Wollstonecraft’s Wrongs of Woman, Hays’s, Emma Courtney, Williams’s Julia, along with chapters on Opie’s The Victim of Prejudice (1799), Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith. Finally, Claudia Johnson’s recent book, Equivocal Beings, uniquely unites Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, and Austen.

While I draw on these works, my approach differs in many respects from these studies. Many of these scholars, particularly Todd, were burdened with the responsibility for digging these novels out of the depths of obscurity and their studies are historically-based reappropriations of the authors. A study that introduces authors to readers is very different from one that presents parallel patterns and themes emerging among many authors that are now more familiar.

Few of these groundbreaking books which trace a tradition of women's writing in England thoroughly address issues of class identity. Alice Browne's claim that “many eighteenth century generalizations about the nature of women are really about non-working

upper-class women” holds true for today’s literary critics who fail to examine class differences (19). For these critics, as the middle-class female experience is taken to be definitive for all women, there is little recognition of the working class’ specific socio-historical condition.

Some of these feminist works employ psycholinguistic and psychosocial theories which are helpful for addressing gender issues, but they also ignore class issues. For example, Ty relies on a feminist psycholinguistic method that employs the works of Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. An example of how Lacanian feminists overlook class is in their argument that “literalization” is used by women writers to subvert the Law of the Father. However, the use of predominantly literal language is also found in the language patterns of the working class.⁷ In addition, these theories presume a model of family that applies only to the dominant classes and do not account for the experience of the working class. Since I do not analyze women’s experiences in terms of maternal relationships, which are private, but in terms of material, or public, institutional relationships, such as marriage, family, school, and work, I rely on a broader social context that goes beyond the psychology of the individual mind. Similarly, postmodern theory, with its erasure of subjectivity, is of little value for an investigation into the socio-historical background and material conditions of both privileged and working-class women that this dissertation accomplishes. Though I am equally concerned with subjectivity, particularly how gender was constructed in the late-eighteenth century by women writers and their contemporaries, I assume, unlike postmodernists, that authors and subjects exist. While I do make some reference to the lives of the authors, I do not depend upon (auto)biographical interpretation as a theoretical foundation. A more

⁷ Basil Bernstein analyzes working-class language in Class, Codes, and Control (1977) which began a controversy over its methods of representation. Richard Ohmann’s work supports a dynamic and contextual model. Tom Fox, invoking Raymond Williams, updates this debate in The Social Uses of Writing: Politics and Pedagogy, (1990).

appropriate framework, I believe, is the cultural materialist approach of social history.

Like Judith Lowder Newton, who is one of the few critics to acknowledge the failure of feminist critics to define historical conditions, I believe that we must avoid isolating the text “from developing material conditions and shifting ideologies” (12). I am also guided by historian Edward Shorter's striking observation that “the gulf between upper middle-class life and the experience of the lower orders was enormous in past times. And accounts of the one are not acceptable substitutes for descriptions of the other” (11). Though I belabor this point, I refer lastly to Anne Mellor, who believes that we need to pay attention “to the voices of the aristocracy and gentry threatened by the bourgeoisie, and to the *equally powerful voices of the working class*, the religious dissenters, the foreign nationals, the emancipated slaves. . . [because] not until we can hear all these voices, these myriad subjectivities, in dialogue with each other, can we claim to understand British Romanticism as either a literary or a cultural or a historical phenomenon” (Romanticism 210; my italics).

In my analyses of these novels, I do not separate class from gender primarily because I do not think women of different classes had the same historical experience in their everyday lives. In this dissertation, I claim that late-eighteenth century feminist arguments for the reform of marriage customs, divorce laws, women's legal rights, and greater accessibility to work and school, along with feminist expressions of sexuality, and feminist redefinitions of womanhood, cannot be fully understood without considering complex notions of social class.

Social Class: Theories and Definitions

A class-based study enables me to look at the construction of separate, but overlapping, categories of what I am calling the middle-class woman, and the working-class woman, including the prostitute. Class is what differentiates these women,

considering their similar cultural backgrounds and race. By interrogating the relationship of class to the construct of Woman, I am able to avoid universalizing the experience of Woman, a prevalent problem in feminist, historical, and literary studies. For example, how can we analyze the development of the “ideal” leisured lady who emerges during industrialization, a time when women’s roles were being redefined, without examining the significance of the changes in labor? There was a substantial rise in the demand for domestic servants by women who signified their class status by decreasing their workload. Hence, I disentangle the distinct experience of the working-class woman from her subsumption by that of the middle class.

For women, class status was much more unstable than for men. Borrowing from Gary Kelly, I would like to ask to what extent did women “identify with or distinguish themselves from the men of ‘their’ class or social group” (Revolutionary 5)? Like Kelly, I believe it was and is a difficult question. Though he offers few answers, at least Kelly asks this question and raises the profile of class status in his study, unlike many literary scholars. A woman’s class ties were weaker and less was at stake because of her subordinate position within a class. If middle-class status was based on property for men, it legally excluded women who were usually unable to own property, especially if they married. Women, instead, were themselves property in patriarchal structures. They were closer to the working classes in that they had few tangible ties to their class. Women of all classes watched their brothers receive education, or professional training, and learn a prestigious skill, or valuable trade, while they were excluded. While women who married or solidified their identities with their families derived their class status from patriarchy, single and rebellious women were always under suspicion and slipped easily from their class identity. R. S. Neale argues that “among the landed classes propriety was to women as property was to men,” a claim which Kelly believes “was even more the case for women of the professional class” (Kelly, Revolutionary 5). Transgressing propriety, our heroines

dissolve one of the only connections they have to their class. Women, like our four authors and their heroines, who freely chose their lovers, led sexually active lifestyles, desired independence, and acted like men, violated codes of feminine propriety and, consequently, suffered a loss of class status. Yet, in many ways our heroines stay within the bounds of propriety by being virtuous, honest, trustworthy, self-sacrificing, and benevolent. Burney presents a different case because she avoided transgressing propriety throughout her life. However, her heroine could certainly be seen as transgressing class boundaries. Our heroines critique a social world that makes women dependent on patriarchy for their class identity. In their attempts to achieve economic independence, their heroines demonstrate women's difficulty in stabilizing their class identities.

At this point I should probably explain how I distinguish between social classes. The term, "class," was in use in the 1790s and used interchangeably with ranks, degrees, and orders (Perkin 24). When necessary, I describe the class position of the families and personages in the novels as accurately as I can. Since there is much more to what comprises class than what income levels or economic factors can divulge, definitions of class are exceedingly difficult. The works of E.P. Thompson and others have made us vividly aware of both the quotidian and the larger cultural context within which classes participated and by which they were constructed. Thompson reminds us that "class is a relationship, and not a thing . . . Class is defined by men [sic] as they live their own history, and in the end, this is its only definition" (11). Moreover, as Gary Kelly claims, social class "may be taken as . . . a manifestation of social conflict rather than the cause of it, as different social groups come to see themselves having common interests, identity and opponents" (2).

Thompson's work provides evidence for his major claim that "the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of 'the working class.' This is revealed, first, in the growth of class-consciousness . . . And, second, in the growth of

corresponding forms of political and industrial organisation” (194). Thompson is guided by Marx’s conception of class formation which occurred “in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter . . .” (Marx 315). Similarly, historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall claim that “the provincial middle class took shape during the turbulent decades of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries” (18). Because of the industrial revolution, the French Revolution, and many other events that affected workers, the 1790s are an important decade in the formation of class consciousness. Though the term may have been fairly new in the late-eighteenth century, if used at all, I employ “working classes,” rather than “lower classes” throughout this dissertation to coincide with Thompson’s history and to emphasize cultural distinctions, not hierarchy.

I use the general term, “middle class,” rather than other terms, like “gentry,” “yeomanry,” or “bourgeoisie,” to describe those who stand between the financially secure, landed, and titled aristocracy and the disenfranchised working poor. The “middle class” included professionals, clergy, merchants, those who owned businesses and those involved in trade. Wollstonecraft defines the middle class in Vindication as those raised “sufficiently above abject poverty not to be obliged to weigh the consequence of every farthing they spend, and having sufficient to prevent their attending to a frigid system of economy which narrows both heart and mind” (255). There were distinctions between the upper and lower middle classes, demonstrating, as in other classes, the heterogeneity of a particular status. However, incomes of between £200 and £300 secured one in this class (Davidoff and Hall 23). Kelly describes the increasing division of the middle class in these Revolutionary years: “Middle-class emulation of their ‘betters’ and desire for upward social mobility led to increasing disdain for the ‘lower orders’ and sharper distinctions between the professions, the commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie and mere ‘tradespeople’”

(4). The same social and cultural changes that increased these divisions enabled the professional bourgeoisie to distinguish itself as a group that was gaining the most influence, power and prestige.

Davidoff and Hall describe the central importance of the “family enterprise” to the lives of the middle class who distinguished themselves from other classes by their commitment to producing income, or “liquid property” (Family 20). They believed in the free market economy and in social order, forming their own kind of paternalism. In all aspects of life, they stressed moderation, a distinctive belief of the middle classes, and were greatly influenced by the moral and humanitarian concerns of Evangelicism.

Because the middle classes valued their private, domestic families and homes in order to withdraw from their marketplace activities, they emphatically promoted the distinctions between the public and private spheres, a process I take as the subject of Chapter Three. Davidoff and Hall offer a gendered critique of this process of spatialized differentiation. Primarily, women’s roles became increasingly limited to household activities. They were even discouraged from being seen in public or riding horseback (Davidoff and Hall 85). Women were limited to certain occupations, such as teaching, innkeeping, and the clothing trades, and discouraged from earning more than they needed for subsistence. Despite these limitations, our educated women authors found ways to earn a living from their writing.

Part of the personal conflict for independence for the women writers under study derives from their middle-class upbringing. Mary Wollstonecraft was the daughter, on her father’s side, of upwardly mobile silk traders who became rentiers. Her mother’s family, the Dicksons, were an Irish Protestant middle-class family of trade (Kelly, Revolutionary 23). Wollstonecraft’s father mismanaged his money and property and spent most of his children’s inheritance. He continually uprooted and settled his family in search for financial stability. Wollstonecraft left home early to work and earn her independence.

Similarly, Frances Burney descended from an upwardly mobile family. Her grandfather was disinherited for his choice of spouse and raised a family in relative poverty. Frances' father, Dr. Charles Burney, earned his place in society through his hard work and ambition. He was apprenticed to a musician and, as Margaret Doody portrays him, submitted passively to patronage. He always worked as a music teacher, but gained fame and fortune with his successful publications, most notably The History of Music (1776-1789). Dependent upon her family, Burney dedicated her days to writing until she received a position as second deputy keeper of the robes for the Queen which came with £200 per annum, an apartment of her own, and servants. Burney miserably endured this "honored" position for five years, being tyrannized by the deputy keeper, Mrs. Schwellenberg.⁸ She clearly knew firsthand what Wollstonecraft calls the "degradation of servitude." To avoid a complete physical and psychological breakdown, she left court and luckily received a pension. Burney returned to her career as a novelist, avoiding complete dependence upon her family, and continued to write after she married in order to support her family. Because of her defiant spirit of independence, Burney felt uncomfortable in the humble companion position she fell into at court and sometimes with her friends, yet she had trouble becoming a social "equal" to those above her because of her unstable class position. She seems to have inherited her father's feelings of insecurity in society. Rizzo describes the border between classes upon which the Burney family tottered: "individual family members had the graces to fit in anywhere, provided they were useful, but the polite world cared little for the family itself (drew the line at marrying into it, for instance) and its acceptance of Charles Burney the music teacher and Frances Burney the novelist in no way provided entrée for the others" (83-84).

Unlike Frances Burney, Amelia Opie moved comfortably in society among men and

⁸ Betty Rizzo describes Burney's endurance of this tyranny in detail in Chapter 2 of Companions Without Vows.

women of letters. Her father succeeded in the professional middle class as a medical doctor, befriending such notables as Samuel Johnson. By 1810, Opie “secured a high position in [London] society” (*DNB* XLII: 228). In contrast, little is known about Mary Hays’s and Helen Maria Williams’s early lives, though it is clear that they came from middle-class families. Williams was the daughter of an army officer (*DNB* LXI: 404). Both Hays and Williams were able to gain financial independence from their writing. Living alone in London, Hays desperately depended upon book review work from Joseph Johnson. Each of these middle-class women felt the tensions of class identity in their lives as their families struggled to enter and remain in the middle class. The instability of their family’s middle-class status, especially in Wollstonecraft’s and Burney’s cases, compounded by the instability of women’s status, finds potent expression in their fiction.

Literary historians, like Janet Todd, have established that the novel was a popular genre that by the late-eighteenth century began to address the needs and concerns of the growing middle class who wanted moral tales and didactic books. In fact, Wollstonecraft addressed her 1792 polemic, *Vindication*, to “middle-class” women.⁹ The middle class were a special group that Wollstonecraft felt were most concerned about education, morality, and political change. Or perhaps she recognized that they had the most substantial interests and resources to promote their beliefs. They were responsible for many important reform measures, particularly those affecting the working classes in the early-nineteenth century. In the early stages of oppositional class activity, there was even broad support from segments of the middle class who aligned themselves with the working classes. Such relationships broke down in the repression years of the late-1790s, as Thompson documents.

By the late-1790s, the promotion of paternalistic middle-class values often took the

⁹ Wollstonecraft writes in her Introduction: “. . . addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state” (81).

form of hegemonic activity: “the middle class . . . aspired to gain a dominant and controlling position within British society for their own social class” (Morris 58). Prominent historians such as E. P. Thompson and most Marxist historians share the view that the increasingly dominant middle-class worldview was at odds with working-class organizations and culture. Even before the moral reform decades of the early-nineteenth century, historical evidence suggests that middle-class values of social and domestic order, cleanliness, and morality were beginning to be imposed upon the working class. Countless examples of middle-class disgust with the lack of moral and physical cleanliness of their servants, tenants, customers, clients, or workers appear in novels and prose of the times, vividly capturing class conflict. Because the middle class feared contamination with the lower classes, the theme of contagion is prevalent in tracts on education and work, and in the belief in a strict social hierarchy. For example, with their supposed ignorance, immorality, and dishonesty, wet nurses and domestic servants seemed to “contaminate” the children and families of the more secure classes. From the late-1790s on, when workers threatened the social order with class levelling, class divisions were boldly drawn and enforced by the middle and upper classes.

Thus, extreme measures were taken to suppress the political activity of the working classes, including the use of force by Volunteer troops organized to control order and later a police force (Morris 57). Stamp taxes were legislated to make newspapers too expensive for the working classes to buy, thereby destroying their main means of communication. Combination Acts prevented large groups from meeting. Thompson claims that “while the years 1791-5 provided the democratic impulse, it was in the repression years that we can speak of a distinct “working-class consciousness” maturing (181). In the bread riots which resulted from price gauging, “. . . the final years of the 18th century saw a last desperate effort by the people to reimpose the older moral economy as against the economy of the free market” (Thompson 67). Such actions would later lead to persecution: “By 1799

nearly all the old leaders were in gaol or in exile. . .” (Thompson 174). In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the poor laws were systematically undermined which, according to Dorothy Marshall, also increased the consciousness of class differences (English Poor 52).

During the 1790s, class ideologies were dramatically contested with increasing conflict. Our novels, which were written during and immediately after this intense period when class relationships were still being formed, reflect resistance to such strict class boundaries which is most evident in their formation of all-female households. Our novelists illustrate the usefulness of women’s solidarity across class lines just as early middle-class political activists had formed alliances with the working classes. The systematic repression of working-class political activity succeeded in breaking ties between classes and resulted in the victorious reign of the middle class in the post-revolutionary years. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, moral reform occupied the thoughts and actions of middle-class do-gooders, who became inspired by Evangelicism. This period is also characterized by the “rise of the domestic woman,” a gender ideology that widened the gap between women of the upper and lower classes. Many are thankful for the end to women’s rights. By the time Burney’s novel is published in 1814, Mary Wollstonecraft is a shameful, outdated figure for Victorian women as the journal writings of her daughter, Mary Shelley, who is extraordinarily uncomfortable with women’s rights issues, exhibit. Because of the break between classes in the late-1790s, we would not expect Burney to support such solidarity. Thus, in the Victorian period there is much evidence of the successful suppression of working-class culture and the rise of middle-class values. But, who were the working classes?

In economic terms, “working class,” refers to unpropertied people dependent upon a wage, including agricultural workers, and day-laborers. In the eighteenth century, according to one historian, Robert Malcolmson, the working class is distinguished by

“manual, often menial tasks and their dependence on such 'laborious' tasks in order to live” (12). Though there is much debate over the historical accuracy of the term, “working class,” I follow E.P. Thompson's understanding and use of it in The Making of the Working Class. At times, however, I use “laboring” or “lower” classes interchangeably. I usually employ the plural form to indicate the heterogeneity of these groups. Drawing heavily on the work of feminist historians, Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, I pay particular attention to domestic servants, as that was one of the most popular female occupations. For women, the rural farmer's experience differed greatly from that of the urban domestic servant's. Also, political, social, moral, and personal beliefs and practices differed from place to place. Like Richard Hoggart, in his documentation of the British working class of the 1950s, The Uses of Literacy, I reject the idealization of the working class.

For the working classes, family and social relationships were determined primarily by the value of their labor. The working-class family depended on all its members to contribute their earnings. Such an arrangement made marriage an economic partnership and the family an economic unit. Wives were chosen for their skills and household management talents. An important distinguishing feature of this class is that young women were expected to work (Rule 181; Tilly, Scott, Cohen 41). They had little choice in the matter since the family's survival dictated this demand. Young, working-class women sent out to work regularly contributed their earnings to their families (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 454). Even children had to contribute to the household economy.

In the rural economy, which involved about 75% of the population in the early part of the eighteenth century, the working classes were able to subsist off a variety of employments including harvesting and spinning. Urban workers, like the rural landless, were dependent on a wage. There was, of course, a labor hierarchy in which some skilled workers, like weavers, artisans and blacksmiths, commanded high salaries and had more social status than their unskilled and casually employed brothers and sisters (Perkin 143).

Domestics servants, on the other hand, took in larger incomes and were provided for in hard times, but had little status, and much resentment, among their peers.¹⁰ They could earn as much as five guineas per annum towards the end of the eighteenth century, and fifteen to twenty guineas in London if they were well-trained, in addition to perquisites like teas, sugar, and clothing (Marshall, English Domestic 17).

Outside of agriculture, the greatest number of women working were found in “domestic service, garment-making, and textiles” (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 457–458). While women in the classes above them were taught “accomplishments” in order to attract a husband, working-class women were taught skills that would enable them to earn a subsistence or contribute to their family's or husband's income. Their education was vocational and took the form of apprenticeships or domestic service training. The parish workhouse system, in particular, provided low-skilled work, such as linen manufacturing, which created, in effect, pauper industries (Marshall, English Poor 40–41). But, female parish apprentices were usually trained for domestic servitude and bound as household help (Marshall, English Poor 195). It is not clear how many young women even completed their apprenticeships since many, suffering from brutal treatment, often ran away. Opened in 1758, the Female Orphan Asylum in Lambeth served as a “domestic science training centre” by establishing seven year apprenticeships for young girls who would be placed in homes as servants (Pinchbeck 1:118). Yet, women also worked in such trades as “millinery, corset, boot- and shoe-making, dress and artificial flower-making, bookbinding, food production and canning, and match-making” (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 459). Women were not limited only to these female occupations. In her landmark study of

¹⁰ In their studies of French domestic servants, both Cissie Fairchilds and Sarah C. Maza argue that the domestic servant occupied a precarious position in the social hierarchy and was caught, in Maza's terms, in “spatial limbo.” They did not fit in either their master's world or the world from which they were uprooted. For a vivid history of the domestic servant in England, see Dorothy Marshall's essay, The English Domestic Servant in History. And, of course, J. Jean Hecht's The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England.

women workers, Ivy Pinchbeck documents women working in trades such as coal mining, metal manufactories, textile factories, and agriculture.

Consequently, there are few distinctions between male and female labor for the working class. At any given time, men or women may alternately dominate the same field. Though some women might give up their positions at the mills and factories after marriage, most would continue working out of necessity to supplement their husbands' wages: "It was assumed by employers that women, unlike men, were not responsible for earning their own living. Female wages were always far lower than males" (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 461). Because women's work was generally unskilled, unstable, and low-paying, working-class women were especially vulnerable to poverty and prostitution. Often, they were vulnerable to sexual assaults and to threats to their economic stability by their masters. The seasonal changes and cycles of unemployment also forced these women to work as prostitutes.

Thus, I treat the prostitute as a member of the working classes. Though there are difficulties in portraying the prostitute, I am persuaded by Philippa Levine's "Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality, History," to be sensitive to historical reality. Therefore, I depend upon works by social historians, like Stanley Nash's 1980 dissertation study of prostitution in London and Randolph Trumbach's forthcoming book, Sex and the Gender Revolution, to provide vividly detailed reconstructions of prostitutes' lives.

In her essay, Levine asks "how historians might gain access to more than mere perceptions by social commentators, but rather to the lives and experiences of those engaged in sexual trading . . . [and] posit ways to read legal history as a form of social and of political history" (479). Levine points out the contradiction of historians representing the prostitute as if she has power, yet asserting her powerlessness by "silencing her historical voice" (480). She wants more rigorous attention to the details of the prostitute's life, instead of writing that perpetuates the misconceptions and metaphors of prostitution.

Just as nineteenth-century commentators dominated the discourse on prostitution without providing any space for the prostitute's voice, modern historians, Levine claims, colonize her experience and casually use prostitution as misleading metaphor. And, by focusing on motive, historians, like their nineteenth century counterparts, perpetuate "a pathology of victimization."

Whereas Levine dismisses the discourse of social commentators because they misrepresent the prostitute, I believe we need to examine their discourse to recognize their position of power, and to avoid conflating their studies with the historical reality of prostitution. In particular, the mediations of the middle class are useful for uncovering just how gendered definitions become encoded and offer a starting point for finding active agency among women. The metaphorical use of prostitution by feminists is crucial to an exploration of sexual identity and the process by which these metaphors are perpetuated equally deserves examination. For these writers, the prostitute was a woman worker. On one hand, the figure of the prostitute warns women against working; associating prostitution with working women tainted the experience: to work was to be defeminized, a process which Jemima, the working-class woman in Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman, undergoes. On the other hand, the prostitute, is presented as a working women's only choice, used by liberal feminists to justify the expansion of female education and employment. Because the heroines of sentimental novels are usually fallen women, Wollstonecraft's novel is remarkably original for realistically portraying the life of a prostitute. As in the tradition of Defoe's Moll Flanders, we see the close association between poverty, crime, and the lack of opportunities for women. Yet, Jemima is not the whore with a heart of gold; it takes the loyalty and trust of Maria's friendship to melt her heart of stone. Jemima's condition is attributed to illiberal oppression of women, unlike the self-constructed Moll, who fails to examine sexual difference.

Chapter Outlines

During the late-eighteenth century, writers became preoccupied with the situation of single, middle-class women who had to secure an independent living. The five novels under study, in addition to the pamphlets, essays, and tracts of such writers as Priscilla Wakefield, Mary Ann Radcliffe, and Clara Reeve are centered on this figure.¹¹ These women writers turned public attention to the socially constructed position of women in society, and specifically, to women's lack of education, lack of legal rights, and lack of viable options for independence. Thus, my dissertation begins with an examination of how the institutions of the family and marriage fail to support the middle-class woman, thereby producing the conditions that liberate her to independence. As one twentieth-century feminist claims, "Marriage and family are important institutions in producing and maintaining sexual difference, and in constructing the individuality of 'women' as relative, and that of 'men' as absolute. If it is difficult for women to fill the contours of an autonomous individual who is not defined in relation to other people, their social citizenship remains limited" (Gordon 176). Gordon's suggestion that the single women's "search for both autonomy and connectedness questions the very notion of citizenship as an abstract masculine category based on separateness and self-interest" (180) also applies to the heroines of the late-eighteenth century.

Therefore, I have organized my first two chapters around the experiences of young, middle-class and upper-class women, demonstrating that for particular ideological reasons, these women writers create heroines who must seek independence. Chapter One, "A

¹¹ Mary Wollstonecraft has an entire section in Thoughts on the Education of Women (1787) devoted to "the unfortunate situation of females educated and left without a fortune." In Reflections on the Present Condition of Women (1798), Priscilla Wakefield calls attention to the plight of females, who do not have the support of fathers and husbands, in order to argue for women's right to work. Other texts include Mary Ann Radcliffe's The Female Advocate (1799), the anonymously written The Female Aegis (1798) and a collection of essays as well as An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798) by Mary Hays.

Home of One's Own: Fractured Families and the Independent Daughter,” demonstrates that the daughter’s lack of social, economic, and psychological security from the death of or abandonment by her parents gives her the opportunity to make it on her own. In some cases, these young women are forced by circumstances out of their control to sustain themselves by working, like Juliet Granville in The Wanderer.

In Chapter Two, “‘Outlaws of the World:’ Women in Marriage,” I look at the marriages portrayed in the novels, the heroines’ attitudes toward marriage, the historically legal position of women in marriage, the social and cultural context of marriage, and the stances of the authors. I demonstrate that the single woman who cannot rely on either her family or a husband is a politicized figure in these novels who must be understood within the framework of contemporary debates on women’s rights. Mercenary marriages are discredited while companionate marriages are valorized in these novels. Few of our heroines enjoy healthy marriages, if they marry at all. The depiction of failed marriages supports the efforts at female independence.

At the same time, as Chapter Three, “Resisting the Ideal: The Fallen Woman and the Prostitute” illustrates, these novelists revised conventional notions of womanhood. This chapter explores the fluid boundaries of femininity by tracing the development of the classist construction of the “ideal” woman and analyzing who was excluded by such a category. The women novelists under study create female characters who subvert and redefine these categories. They fictionalize the distresses of the single woman in the face of dominant views of traditional gender arrangements, articulated most powerfully in the moral discourses of domestic advice books. Within the constraints of “ideal” womanhood which emphasizes maternity and is structured within the patriarchal family, the marginalized single woman appears deviant. Nevertheless, our heroines, however transgressive their sexual behavior, are also accomplished domestic women, thereby emphasizing the instability of these categories of women. At the same time, with their

desire for independence and their successes/failures at working, our heroines also transgress the middle-class ideal of womanhood, the subject of Chapter Four: "Asserting Women's Rights: Female Education and Employment." Our authors' reformist ideas are limited by their own social class status; their heroines' struggles for independence apply only to the middle and upper classes. This chapter also focuses on the working-class woman's experience. For example, while seeking to understand the working-class woman's daily experiences, we discover that because of the instability of seasonal trades and the market, the low status of uneducated and unskilled work, the low pay, and the ever-present danger of unemployment, working-class women fell into prostitution quite easily. While I discuss the realities of prostitution for working-class women, I also analyze the metaphorical use of prostitutes by late-eighteenth century writers and examine the laws of prostitution that sought to restrict female space and female desire, confining women to lawful sexual practice.

We see both the possibilities of redemption and the limits of liberal feminism in the type of friendships I take as my subject for Chapter Five, "Redeeming Women: Female Friendships," I contrast the gender-biased designs of the punishing laws against prostitution with the ideas of prostitution reform which evolved from the establishment of the Magdalen Hospital for penitent prostitutes in which redemption becomes a reality. This history of redemption for the prostitute frames my discussion of the novels. Among many of their common features, these novels are distinguished by their portrayals of female friendships that cross class boundaries. Though domestic servants are elevated to the status of family, a literary innovation that deemphasizes strict class boundaries, the attempt at equality falls short. Servants enable privileged heroines to achieve their independence, but do not quite share in it. As I point out, though the stories are mediated by women of superior social status, working-class women have an active part. I interpret the portrayal of all-female households as a political expression conveying, once again, like many other

elements of the novels, the reformist vision of female independence from the patriarchal family and marriage, and from conservative gender ideology. As this last chapter illustrates, there are many contradictions in the fictional representation of class conflicts and constructions of womanhood. In particular, interpreting Opie's Adeline Mowbray is complicated by its ambiguous representation of a fallen woman who is virtuous. I find evidence to support a radical feminist interpretation of the novel, though the novel is one in which a young, sexually liberated woman becomes repentant, regretting her earlier unconventional lifestyle. This study, thus, appropriately concludes with close textual readings of each of the novels' conclusions which deviate from tradition by having single or widowed women forming all-female households. Burney's novel is treated briefly in this chapter.

PART THREE: THE AUTHORS AND THEIR NOVELS

BIOGRAPHIES, PLOTS, RECEPTION

Introduction

During the 1790s and the first decades of the 1800s, the sense of hope for social change from the French Revolution still permeated political consciousness. In her preface to The Wanderer, Burney claims that the French Revolution left its mark on generations of English writers:

to attempt to delineate, in whatever form, any picture of actual human life, without reference to the French Revolution, would be as little possible, as to give an idea of the English government, without reference to our own: for not more unavoidably is the last blended with the history of our nation, than the first, with every intellectual survey of the present times. (6)

As the rights of the bourgeois man broadened, dissenting voices of women, the working class, and Methodists, to name a few, demanded to be heard. In their fiction and non-

fiction, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Amelia Opie, and Frances Burney actively participated in the discourse of egalitarianism, contributing extensively to what scholars call the “war of ideas.”¹²

Thus, these female authors have a geo-ideological link, what I informally call “the French connection.” France provided a literal “common ground” where their sympathies resided and where, for most of them, their actual residences were located. These women witnessed and participated in the history-making events of the Revolution. Helen Maria Williams became well-known for her first-hand accounts of the civil war, Letters from France; she was the first to report every movement of the revolution in this series of letters which captivated her English audience. In the early 1790s, Williams moved to France permanently with her family. Inspired by Williams’s success, Wollstonecraft stayed in Paris for a few years beginning in 1792, began a similar project like Letters, and produced several political essays on France.¹³ She met many well-known expatriates and political figures at Helen Maria Williams’s famous salon. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Frances Burney looked back on these apocalyptic years and finished a novel she began in the 1790s. Married to a French émigré, she also lived in France for many years, but was not as enthusiastic as the other four about a revolution that cost her husband his property and made their lives exceedingly difficult. Amelia Opie and her husband, John Opie, the celebrated painter, met well-known political leaders, artists, and members of high society when they visited Paris in 1802. Opie enjoyed her visits to Paris during the 1820s,

¹² Marilyn Butler uses this term in Jane Austen and the War of Ideas. Other scholars such as Claudia Johnson also use this phrase.

¹³ Gary Kelly reports that “only one of the ‘Series of Letters on the Present Character of the French Nation’ was written, dated ‘Paris, 15 February, 1793’” (Revolutionary 147). Wollstonecraft also penned Historical and Moral View... of the French Revolution (1794). Of course, her earlier work, A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) was a direct and immediate response to Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).

long after her husband was dead, where she met Mme de Genlis, Lafayette, and others. Although it appears that Mary Hays never set foot on French soil, she embraced the spirit of the Revolution and remained a Jacobin throughout her life, for which she was branded a subversive and for which her literary career suffered. These writers were a small, but daring, circle of women energized by the politics of their day.

Wollstonecraft captures the “equalizing” sentiments of her generation and transforms them into a vindication of the rights of woman. With the exception of Frances Burney, all of these supporters of the Revolution knew Wollstonecraft personally and corresponded with her. Burney, instead, influenced the fictional strategies of both Wollstonecraft and Godwin (Doody 147). The backdrop on the literary stage of these five novels under study is Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Each of the women writers in my study responded to and even rewrote or fictionalized this text. Like Wollstonecraft's Vindication, these novels articulate one form of feminism, liberal feminism, the belief that “the roots of women’s oppression lie in women’s lack of equal civil rights and equal educational opportunities” (Jaggar 85). Liberal feminists argue that “difference” is constructed socially, and that physiological or psychological sex differences should not constitute the bases for discrimination against women. Liberal feminists demand legal, economic, and political equality for all women. These beliefs have their origins in the social contract theories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Jaggar 83) and emerge distinctly in the late-eighteenth century during the French Revolution when liberty, fraternity, and equality become dominant social values. The notion of individuality, that a member of society should be able to fulfill his/her own potential superseded prior fixed structures of social hierarchy, state authority, and aristocratic inheritance: “Thus liberalism maintains, not that all individuals can attain the same achievements but rather that gender in itself is no more a proper criterion for determining what opportunities an individual should have than was nobility of birth”

(Jaggar 217). Gary Kelly calls Wollstonecraft's feminism "Revolutionary feminism," reminding us that although the word "feminism" does not appear until the 1890s, there were feminisms in England before then such as "Renaissance feminism, seventeenth-century court and anti-court feminism, mid-eighteenth century Bluestocking feminism and feminisms within cultural movements such as Sensibility and Evangelicalism" (Revolutionary 2). Kelly's use of "revolutionary" positions Wollstonecraft furthest from the status quo. However, I use the term, "liberal feminism" throughout this dissertation.

Because my readers may not be entirely familiar with some of these novels and because the chapters are organized thematically, rather than devoted to a single novel, brief descriptions of the novels follow to avoid confusion and repetition. I begin with Mary Wollstonecraft and The Wrongs of Woman because of her wide-ranging influence on the other authors and their works. Then, I proceed in chronological order of publication, concluding this section with Frances Burney. In each section I introduce the author and include biographical material relevant to the production of the novel, summarize the novel, discuss the novel's reception history and any other relevant biographical detail, and finally, briefly survey twentieth-century approaches. In these sections, I demonstrate how closely involved these women writers were with each others' lives and works and why it is appropriate to group them together in this dissertation study.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1757-1798) and

The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment (1798)

Wollstonecraft holds the unique position of being the impetus for and central focus of this dissertation. As the famous vindicator of women's rights, she attracted the support of her contemporaries, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, and Amelia Opie, during the 1790s, and, of Frances Burney, years later. She was the personal friend of all of them,

except Burney, whose works she admired and whose innovative use of “free indirect discourse” she borrowed.¹⁴ Mary Hays, whose life was changed by Vindication, enthusiastically wrote to Wollstonecraft and a meeting was arranged at the home of London publisher, Joseph Johnson, in 1792. Hays was devoted to Wollstonecraft for the rest of her life, following in her footsteps, playing the part of protégé. A testimony to Hays’s devotion is the compelling eulogy she wrote for Wollstonecraft in The Monthly Magazine which was accidentally published anonymously. Painfully upset, Hays wrote the editor that “it was my desire and intention to have affixed my name, as a public testimony of respect and affection for my late admirable friend . . . to have been ranked among the number of her distinguished friends . . . [is] among the circumstances of my life, which I shall ever remember with equal pride and pleasure” (Durant xxix). This letter appeared in a subsequent edition of the Magazine.

In 1792, Wollstonecraft also met Helen Maria Williams. According to Godwin, who mentions very few of Wollstonecraft’s friends in his Memoirs, “There . . . subsisted a very sincere friendship between her and Helen Maria Williams . . . who at that time [1792] resided in Paris” (67). Wollstonecraft’s most recent biographer, Gary Kelly, portrays Williams as an important role model for Mary who “hoped to emulate Williams’s literary, social and political career in Paris” (Revolutionary 145). Williams was already famous for her chronicle of French politics and presided over what Kelly claims to be “the most important expatriate salon” to which Wollstonecraft was invited and where she met Gilbert Imlay (146).

Like Hays, Amelia Alderson Opie was overjoyed at meeting Wollstonecraft. Their friendship began in 1796, subsequent to the one she already held with Godwin. The

¹⁴ According to Gary Kelly, “free indirect discourse” was “the relatively new method of fusing third-person and first-person narration. This method was coming to dominate prose fiction, led by such novels as Frances Burney’s Cecelia (1784), which Wollstonecraft had read” (51).

strong loyalties of Opie, Hays, and Williams were unbroken by an event that proved to be a test of friendship: Wollstonecraft's marriage to Godwin. Because Wollstonecraft continued to use the name of her former lover, going by the name "Mrs. Imlay," many of her acquaintances would now have to admit that they welcomed an unmarried mother into their society. Consequently, now that she was legally married, these same people disassociated from her. But, according to Godwin, in his Memoirs, Wollstonecraft did not pretend to be married to Imlay and was open about her arrangement with him. Their marriage alienated many friends like the actress, Sarah Siddons, and the novelist, Elizabeth Inchbald, who seemed more concerned with their reputations. Wollstonecraft's loss of friends ominously foreshadowed her loss of reputation from Godwin's Memoirs.

Similarly, Godwin had to face a harshly critical crowd who delighted in pointing out his inconsistent practice of marriage with his anti-marriage principles in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793). Even his friend Amelia Opie remarked sarcastically, "what charming things would sublime theories be, if one could make one's practice keep up with them" (Brightwell 61). According to Opie, the "wonder-creating event," was the subject of talk amongst their coterie of friends. However, anticipating their loss of credibility, the Godwins kept their marriage quiet. As late as 1805, in his preface to Fleetwood; or, The New Man of Feeling, Godwin was compelled to address his critics: "Certain persons, who condescend to make my supposed inconsistencies the favourite object of their research, will perhaps remark, with exultation, on the respect expressed in this work for marriage . . ." Despite Godwin's marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft, his justification for his changed views on marriage in his preface, and his expurgation of the sections on marriage from subsequent editions of Enquiry, The Anti-Jacobin Review found "his real opinion . . . to be, that marriage is necessarily destructive of happiness" in their review of Fleetwood (343). The reviewer draws his conclusion from the fact that Fleetwood reunites with his wife even though their marriage was dissolved legally with the

help of an evil cousin who wants Fleetwood's property. Apparently, as this review shows, Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's views on and practice of marriage were still the subject of controversy in the post-revolutionary decades by critics who sought to prove them wrong.

Though Godwin's biography inadvertently damaged Wollstonecraft's reputation with its honest explicitness of her sexual life and lack of religiosity, many women writers, like Frances Burney, and Wollstonecraft's friends, Hays and Opie, dared to include Wollstonecraftian ideas in their fiction, risking the brand of "whore" which Wollstonecraft, unfortunately, did not escape. These three women writers responded to her work and represented her in their novels. She appears as Adeline Mowbray, who upholds Godwinian principles and bears a child outside of marriage, but retracts and insists on marrying so her second daughter could be born legitimately. Hays's Emma Courtney and Burney's Elinor Joddrel challenge social prejudices against women by invoking revolutionary discourse, and by actively pursuing potential lovers. Wollstonecraft inspired the creation of a new character type, designated by Claudia Johnson as "the freakish feminist" or "female philosopher," a caricatured form who is ridiculed in "reactionary" novels. Johnson explains that this female figure is a "rhetorical device to subvert the anti-Jacobin novel from within," allowing the female novelist to lay feminist issues on the table (Jane Austen 19).

As Janet Todd, B. J. MacCarthy, and of course, William Godwin, remind us, Wollstonecraft took her own life as the subject of her literary efforts.¹⁵ I need not rehearse the familiar tale of Mary's family woes: her mother's preference for her elder brother, her father's brutality, her generous maternal support for her siblings and her continued

¹⁵ Janet Todd, The Sign of Angellica, Chapter 13. Dale Spender, Mothers of the Novel, Chapter 15: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Autobiographical Fiction. B. J. MacCarthy writes this about Wollstonecraft's early works: "Mary, a Fiction (1788) is a further development of the same theme--the theme of Mary's life" (The Female Pen 426).

financial support of her father, or her personal disappointments: her uncompromising love for Fanny Blood, Henry Fuseli, and Gilbert Imlay; her thrice-attempted suicide, or her stint as a governess in Ireland. Hers is the story of eighteenth-century women. Wollstonecraft suffered physically from the constraints of womanhood, often describing her nervous complaints, misery, and depression in letters to her sisters and friends. Was this bodily pain the outcome of her unfeminine intellectual growth, the result of a woman who disrupted the customs of her time? Though Godwin emphasizes Mary's shining eyes, healthy vigor, and sparkling energy throughout his Memoirs, she appears to have been a miserable creature until she met him. Her early rejections paved the way for later despair, loneliness, and alienation, though she found happiness and love with Godwin in her final year. It is no wonder that she sets her last work of fiction in an asylum, and writes about a woman pursued as a fugitive from her husband, and about outcasts like the prostitute, Jemima.

Mary Wollstonecraft's second novel, The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria. A Fragment (1798), depicts "the wrongs of different classes of women," as she describes it in a letter to her friend, Mr. Dyson. It is hailed by one historian as "one of the earliest novels dealing with [the] relationship between poverty and prostitution" (Kishtainy 46). Ellen Moers refers to it as the "first novel by a woman to use the asylum as a setting" and, thus, situates it within the Gothic tradition (133). Ann H. Jones asserts that "Wollstonecraft went much further than her contemporaries in defiance of sexual mores . . . [and] [s]he also went much further than earlier novelists in the tradition of protest, by criticizing not only the seducer and the social ostracism of his victim, but the very definition of seduction" (132). In my discussion of the novel, I closely examine the portrayal of a prostitute and a working-class woman in the character of Jemima, which has attracted little attention.

Godwin gathered together the bits and pieces of the manuscript including the notes

and outlines for the conclusion and published it after Mary's death with his Memoirs. Unlike her previously hasty efforts, she proceeded slowly on this novel, a sign of her growing maturity as a writer. Godwin informs us that "She wrote many parts of the work again, and again, and, [preferred] to revise and improve what she had written, than to proceed . . . in the parts that were to follow" (111). There is enough written to treat it like a coherent story until we get to the end, but we must remember that it is unfinished. It is a work that challenges the problematic assumptions of authorial intention. Gary Kelly claims that she "intended to convert the mere novel to her Revolutionary feminist revision of the professional middle-class cultural revolution" (Revolutionary 206).

The story begins with the meeting between Maria Venables, a 26-year old middle-class woman who is thrown into an insane asylum by her husband, and Jemima, the matronly, working-class, warden. Jemima and Maria develop an intense friendship once they have revealed their painful life histories. They are joined by Henry Darnford, a fellow inmate with whom Maria has developed a romantic friendship, who first tells his story of a dissipated and distracted youth and his life in America. After Jemima presents her oral history, Maria shares her memoirs written to her infant daughter.

Jemima's story presents the hardships of a working-class woman's life. Born illegitimately to servants, Jemima never has a normative family experience. Because her mother dies nine days after giving birth, she also never has a loving home. She is made a servant-girl at a very early age by her father's wife in order to care for their baby while she remains uncared for. With this work experience, she is sent out to another home as a servant where she is brutally treated and eventually raped and thrown out on the streets. Most of her life is a matter of finding work whether through prostitution, needlework, or laundry. She leads a life without hope, love, or friendship. The job at the asylum provides her with a steady income, a safe environment, and the road to recovery.

Though Maria comes from a more privileged background with a prosperous family,

servants, and security, she too suffers oppressively. She marries at an early age to escape her dysfunctional family only to be mentally and physically abused by her husband who values her only for her access to her uncle's wealth. When she determines to separate from him, he refuses to settle and throws her into the insane asylum, taking her newborn from her. Maria seems to find a healthy relationship with Darnford who is also imprisoned wrongfully. She battles in court for her legal right to a divorce and to her right to live unmarried with Darnford, but loses.

Although Wollstonecraft left this novel unfinished, the designs for the ending and the direction the story seems to take point to the continuity of Jemima's and Maria's friendship without the presence of Darnford. Some of the endings Wollstonecraft sketched include a second pregnancy for Maria, a miscarriage, and a mysterious discovery, all of which destabilize the relationship with Darnford. After a suicide attempt, there is the possibility of Maria being reunited with her daughter.

Mary Wollstonecraft's works have generated the largest bulk of scholarship, from early reviews to the recent book by Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings, a quantity comparable only to the attention given to Frances Burney's novels. Indeed, Wollstonecraft was a prolific writer of many genres: she composed political and educational tracts, two novels, and book reviews, translated texts from French and German, and wrote of her travels to Scandinavia and an historical study of the French. She has been the subject of parodies and plays, and, most recently, a novel, Vindication (1992), by Frances Sherwood, an indication of a reputation that has endured over two hundred years from the post-Revolutionary past to the post-modern present. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to review all of her works and the contributions to Wollstonecraft studies. Since her fall into disfavor in the early nineteenth century after Godwin published the first biography of her, Wollstonecraft's reputation as a bold and original thinker has been recuperated. We do not

begin to see a restoration of her name until the late-nineteenth century. Of course, Wollstonecraft's popularity probably increased with the public support of feminism in the later Victorian era.

Indeed, Wollstonecraft was the subject of few biographies before the 1970s, a time of renewed feminist activity when an explosion of biographies and critical works was produced that has continued to the present day, ensuring a lasting reputation. Some authoritative biographies include the award-winning A Different Face by Emily Sunstein, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft by Claire Tomalin, and the recent Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft by Gary Kelly. As long as the mindset of feminism prevails, she will always be a favored figure, inspiring generations of feminists. Over two centuries later, we continue to be awed by her gutsiness, strength, intellectual energy, principled determination, and revolutionary ideas.

Since we cannot blame Godwin's biography for singlehandedly destroying a feminist movement, we must wonder why what is now accepted historically as a "backlash" against feminism gained momentum. By presenting Wollstonecraft and her last literary effort alongside the works of her supporters in this dissertation, we can see more clearly the influence her work did have, despite the assumption by many, like Timothy Reiss, that, "Mary Wollstonecraft and her feminist contemporaries . . . achieved little or no immediate effect" (16). Perhaps the critical reaction to Burney's last novel, which she began in the 1790s as a response to Wollstonecraft's philosophies, but did not publish until 1814 when Wollstonecraft was supposedly a forgotten figure, will provide us with some answers.

**Helen Maria Williams (1762-1827) and
Julia (1790)**

Helen Maria Williams is most well-known for her eyewitness report of the immediate aftereffects of the French Revolution, Letters from France, an overtly political work spanning six years that is “rhetorically sentimental.”¹⁶ During the time that Williams reported on the political turmoil, her home in Paris became a lively center of intellectual communality. The boundaries between the domestic and the political that collapse in both the historical report and the author’s life are also evident in Julia, a sentimental novel published a few months before the Letters in 1790. Though a novel like Julia is usually cast aside as “sentimental” by those who dismiss its value, this domestic fiction engages in a substantive critique of the politics of gender and class roles, and, in particular, traditional marriage customs. The story’s depiction of a woman’s repressed passion, failed marriages, and characters who prefer a single life enrich our understanding of late-eighteenth century women’s lives. What we see in Julia is the inauguration of a unique radical feminist vision in a politically engaging work.

Helen Maria Williams’s Julia is the young heroine who endures a passionate conflict between her love for her cousin, Charlotte, and her love for Charlotte’s fiancé/ husband, Frederick Seymour. In this classic love triangle story, Julia Clifford and Frederick struggle over whether to uphold their family and social loyalties or surrender to their passion for each other. The plot of the novel evolves from the moment this passion is acknowledged. With remarkable, feminine self-control, Julia resists Frederick who succumbs to the “fatal ascendancy” of this illicit passion. While she remains “like a rock” (Wollstonecraft, “Rev.” 252), his passion for her is likened to a disease that invades him and takes over his life. He devises ways of meeting her, seeing her, talking to her, dancing

¹⁶ The first series of letters were published in 1790 with subsequent series appearing until 1796. The phrase is Todd’s, in The Sign of Angellica, p. 150.

with her, for without her in his sight, his life has no meaning. She, meanwhile, spends most of her time avoiding him and, of course, controlling her passion for the sake of Charlotte whose friendship takes precedence over her own happiness. Julia chooses to live unmarried after rejecting several advantageous marriage proposals while Frederick dies. Overtly, his death from this destructive passion contains a conservative moral message. Williams tells us in her preface that “the purpose of these pages is to trace the danger arising from the uncontrouled indulgence of strong affections,” and the novel seems to support such a reading (iii). But, Frederick's death necessitates the recovery of Julia and Charlotte's friendship and the completion of a household of women with Mrs. Meynell, a young, working-class widow. Though Williams couches her radicalism in more conservative images and disturbingly relies on writers, like Dr. Gregory, who reinforce a subordinate female role, Williams undermines this reading by suggesting, I argue, a revolutionary reform of marriage customs and gender roles that valorize passion, egalitarianism, companionship, and female autonomy and problematizes the politics of gender and class. Julia's melodramatic self-control and Frederick's commitment to honor leave their unconsummated relationship solely in the realm of abstract desire; yet, there is the sense in the novel that they are filled with regret for their choices and that we should sympathize and pity them for constructing lives that remain emotionally unfulfilled. Thus, through Julia's self-abnegating suffering from an unfulfilled passionate life, Williams suggests that passion be restored to female life: the gendered imbalance is destructive.

Rather than end the novel with the conventional closure of marriage assuring us of the continuity of life, Williams leads us to consider the failures of marriages based on convenience, hate, envy, and greed. The final scenes in the Clifford mansion, where most of the action takes place, display female solidarity. Julia and Charlotte are reunited in a “perfect friendship,” together with Charlotte's son and Mrs. Meynell. After the death of the patriarch, Mr. Clifford, a matriarchal household survives. Williams essentially

proposes that women begin to depend upon themselves and each other, rather than depend upon institutions like that of marriage, for creating their own subjectivities. Indeed, Williams herself did not marry and lived independently in France most of her life as a celebrated writer and chronicler of the Revolution. Like Wollstonecraft, Williams insists on female fulfillment and a mind-body holism that supersedes female dependency. For these female characters who have been either widowed or orphaned, patriarchal figures and institutions have little power in this self-sustained domestic economy.

By 1790, when Julia was published, Williams's reputation was solidly built on her poetry; she was yet to inundate her English audience with her pro-Revolutionary sentiments in her reports from France, published in the same year. Williams began her career, like many radicals, in the tradition of Dissent which is evident in all her writing, including her early poetry. Some of her poems vocalize her condemnation of slavery, colonial oppression, and international war. While Julia was being reviewed in the journals, Williams was heading for France. Just a few months after the novel was published, Williams records her arrival in Paris on 13 July 1790 in her Letters from France; within a few years, she made the French capital her permanent home, remaining committed to the ideals of the French Revolution.¹⁷ Notable luminaries from the political, social, and literary scenes gathered at Williams's salon, where she met Mary Wollstonecraft. Incidentally, she had met Frances Burney in the late 1770s at an evening party. Following a decree against all English in 1795, Williams and her family were arrested and imprisoned for three months in the Luxembourg prison and then transferred for the same length of time

¹⁷ There are conflicting reports on when the Williams family moved permanently to Paris. Deborah Kennedy claims it was 1792 (95) whereas Anne Mellor identifies 1790 as the starting point (71). Matthew Bray mentions that she returns to France in 1791, implying a visit to England between 1790 and 1791 (2). The DNB mentions more precisely that "In 1788 she went over to France on a visit to her elder sister, Cecilia. . . and from that time she for the most part resided there, intermittently at first, but afterwards continuously. . . She died in Paris on 15 Dec. 1827, and was buried beside Stone in Père Lachaise" (21:404).

to the convent of Les Anglaises, as documented in the Letters (Kennedy 97). With her Republican sympathies, Williams's loyalties fell to the Girondins, some of whom were executed by the Jacobins.

Wollstonecraft was familiar with Williams's previous work and reviews the novel favorably in the highly respected, radical Analytical Review, dwelling on its naturalistic qualities and animated feeling. Though she measures the novel against Charlotte Smith's work to its disadvantage, Wollstonecraft approves of the novel's implications that "love is not to be conquered by reason" and praises Williams for not conforming to conventional notions of the female sex by not including "scenes of dissipation" and "dresses described with the earnest minuteness of vanity" in her novel. Most importantly, for Wollstonecraft, Williams's expression "comes directly from her heart." Wollstonecraft has little description of the story, devoting most of her review to Williams's writing style. She thinks the novel is "not sufficiently dramatic to excite lively sympathy or interest; nor complex enough" and complains of the excess of allusions and quotations and of Julia's incredulously uncompromising behavior. Even a twentieth-century critic notes with sarcasm: "Julia is purer than the driven snow and of the most delicate sensibility" (MacCarthy 324). Wollstonecraft recognizes a sensibility in Williams that sets her apart from what she sees as frivolous writers.

Similarly, the Monthly Review contains a favorable review of Julia in which the reviewer presents the novel as an exception to his general complaint of the proliferation of novels which "frequently poison the mind." The critic finds very little fault with the novel, pointing out only her unrealistic representation of card-room language, the caricature of a buffoonish servant, and the lack of "incidents." On the other hand, the reviewer commends her "useful moral," her "well-drawn" characters, and her poetry, ("the best parts of the work . . . [that] considerable enhance the value of the volumes"). Interestingly, the reviewer dwells on the card-party scene at Mrs. Chartres and quotes a lengthy passage that

describes this woman who is notable for her imitation of fashionable life. I discuss this same scene in Chapter One of this dissertation for its heightened display of class conflict.

The Critical Review also excitingly extols this novel. What faults the reviewer finds with the novel are buried under exceeding praise. For example, he or she writes: "The poetry, interspersed, perhaps too frequently interspersed, deserves the character we have already had occasion to give of this lady's works: it is in general tender, pathetic, and pleasing." Similarly, the critic points out Williams's heavy reliance on quotations, but excuses this because Shakespeare is usually the source, and because it is a common practice even among reviewers. Like most of the reviewers of the novel, this one comments upon Julia's "exemplary" conduct, adding, unlike the other reviewers, that "she scarcely deserves the punishment of celibacy."

Williams's first and only novel attracted much more attention when it was first published than it did subsequently; it faded from literary history as her chronicles of France rose to prominence. Virtually no scholarship has been devoted to this novel. Literary historians and scholars usually cast the novel aside, believing, like B.J. MacCarthy, that "this story has nothing to recommend it" (323).

To date, there is only one lengthy essay on the novel, in Eleanor Ty's book. Brief mention of the novel is made in Anne Mellor's most recent book. Usually it appears in footnotes in histories of women's writing. In my discussion of the novel I place its anti-marriage sentiment within the framework of feminist reform. My perspective concords with that of Ty who argues that Julia is "politically suggestive" and "can be read as a strong statement against patriarchy, and an effort to escape conventional roles designed by society for women" (73). We differ, though, in approaches. Ty uses psychoanalysis and Carol Gilligan's psycho-social theories to represent Julia's actions as guided by a "maternal ethos," whereas I see Julia as a revolutionary "new woman," whose actions and thoughts suggest social reform.

We can see that, like Wollstonecraft's Mary and Wrongs, Julia is not a well-structured, sophisticated, or faultless work, but like those novels, it is worthy of study, particularly in relation to Williams's political works. With the inclusion of her poetry, the novel reminds us of Williams's versatility as a writer. And it offers a view of gender roles and social customs, by an unconventional, but rational, female philosopher. The conflicts the heroine faces are similar to those in the other works grouped together in this study.

Mary Hays (1769-1843) and The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796)

In a letter dated 14 October 1794, Mary Hays's eager request to William Godwin for a copy of his Political Justice (1793), which she had trouble locating, began a long-term correspondence and a life-long friendship with the philosopher, led to her publication of The Memoirs of Emma Courtney in 1796, and to his marriage with her friend, Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1797. Hays's request for the book indicates her fervent desire for intellectual attainments and her search for an intellectual community which she fulfills with her association with the famous philosopher. Soon after, she asks him to give her any work in translation and book reviews, and feedback on the novel he encouraged her to write. In the throes of a deep passion for a prominent Cambridge Dissenter, William Frend, who is unable to return the esteem she so generously offers, Hays also relies on Godwin's opinion, advice, and listening skills. The letters, in fact, demonstrate what Hays scholars have always claimed and what some of Hays's contemporaries censured her for, that The Memoirs of Emma Courtney are autobiographically based upon her futile relationship with Frend.¹⁸ When Godwin asks her to rewrite it, she admits to basing

¹⁸ Hays did not reveal his name to Godwin, though he pressed her for it. It became well-known at a later period, and the subject of ridicule, perhaps through Frend himself. Katherine M. Rogers calls Emma Courtney, "the idealized and partially autobiographical heroine of Hay's first novel" in her essay, "The Contribution of Mary Hays," a comparative study of Hays and her female contemporaries that touches on

Emma Courtney on herself and tells Godwin her manuscript “was not written merely for the public eye--another latent, and perhaps stronger, motive lurked beneath--If this in some respects, has spoiled my story, ---it has also given to it, that ‘energy of feeling, and ardor of expression’ which impressed you I intended this book to be a memento of my own folly or madness” (Letter 21, 11 May, 1796 Pforzheimer). She has a complete draft ready for Godwin’s perusal by 1 March, 1796 and he reviews it several times between then and May; it is published in November. Godwin agrees to respond to her long, heated letters only in person, having no time to write back. Hays, thus, leaves a prolific record of her distress, and at times, deep, almost suicidal, depression. She suffered not only from an early tragedy in which her lover died and from Frennd’s unrequited love, but, like Mary Wollstonecraft, from the intellectual, emotional, psychological, and physical constraints of being a woman in the late-eighteenth century. She cries out to Godwin:

Hemmed in, on every side, by the constitution of society and not less so, it may be, by my own prejudices I perceive, indignantly perceive, *the magic circle*, without knowing how to dissolve the spell!--While men pursue honor, pleasure, interest, ambition, as accords with their several dispositions--Women, who have too much sense, spirit, and delicacy, 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 absurd and often tragical, drama of life. (Letter 6, 28 July 1795 Pforzheimer: my emphasis)

Mine, I believe, is almost a solitary madness in the eighteenth century.

Why call woman, miserable, oppres’d, and impotent, woman: crushed and

all of her works. The censures are discussed below.

then insulted-- why call her to an 'independence' which not nature, but the accursed and barbarous hand of society have denied her? (Letter 12, 6 February 1796 Pforzheimer)

I am a woman. . . It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my sex, I am not a mere fine lady, a domestic drudge, or a doll of fashion, I can think, write, reason, converse with men and scholars, and I despise many petty, feminine prejudices. (Letter 14 14-20 February 1796 Pforzheimer)

Reading these statements along with her many references to her poor health, her soul-sickness, as she calls it, and her depression, we can begin to understand the consequences of a strictly gendered social world for women. Many will recognize these words as belonging to Emma Courtney. In fact, several of Hays's letters to Godwin make it into The Memoirs of Emma Courtney disguised as Emma's letters to the philosophical Mr. Francis, a character resembling Godwin, who befriends Emma and acts as a mentor, advising her on her plans for life and her pursuit of Augustus Harley.

In The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), Emma is compelled, at a late age, to tell the story of her life to her adopted son, Augustus Harley, the son of the man she spent many years pursuing romantically. Fearing he will succumb to her same "errors" in love, to the same "excesses" in passion, she presents her life as a warning, asking him to learn from it. Because she firmly believes that early associations form one's character, she begins her history with her parents. When her mother dies during her birth, she is handed over to her mother's sister, Mrs. Melmoth, who recently lost a daughter. Emma enjoys her childhood with the generous and affectionate Melmoths; her bliss is eventually disturbed when her father suddenly appears to guide her education when she is about twelve. She attends boarding school, reads through her father's library and copes with the death of her

uncle. By the time she is nineteen, her aunt and her father also die.

With the loss of her family, Emma is forced to gain her independence. As an orphan, she must find a home, and as a woman, a place in the prevailing social arrangements. Though she is provided for by her father's brother's family, the Mortons, she insists on staying with them only until she can find a way to support herself. At Morton Park, Emma gains the friendship of an older man, Mr. Francis, who becomes her counsel, and the romantic attention of a young, ambitious man, Mr. Montagu. She also develops a close friendship with an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Harley, and becomes intensely infatuated with her son whom they discuss often. But Emma scurries from the cold, unfriendly Morton home to the warm, congenial Harley cottage, not quite settled at either place, still searching for a home. After meeting Harley and gaining his friendship, she confesses her love for him and actively urges him to love her, to no avail. As it turns out, in a mysterious gothic fashion, Harley is already married to a West Indian.

When she leaves both homes for London, while in a coach, she laments to her fellow passenger, Montagu, that she has no home, and is "unprotected." Without the option of marriage to guarantee her moral, sexual, and financial protection, Emma turns to the relatively few employment opportunities open to her. Unfortunately, her paths to independence are blocked: a teaching position proves difficult to find, servitude is deemed "degradation" and an annuity investment fails. Emma, in desperation, accedes to Montagu's (fourth) marriage proposal although she does not love him. Marriage is presented as the only choice left when a woman's options run out; it is justified as long as women cannot achieve independence. Although late-eighteenth century women may have been taught to attain the ideal marriage, Hays shows us scene upon scene of marital discord and dysfunctional family life. Again, we are shown the failures of these two institutions (marriage and family) in providing the needs of women. Hays, like our other women writers, believes that women must be allowed the same opportunities for independence as

men.

Like Williams, Hays ends her story with an image of female unity: the widowed Emma settling with her daughter, adopted son, and a young fallen woman, Rachel. Rachel, the eighteen-year old nanny, was seduced by Montagu in his rage of jealousy after the return of Augustus in Emma's life; he punishes her for having loved another man. When he is injured in a riding accident nearby, Augustus is brought to Emma who nurses him. Before he dies, she promises to raise his son and later adopts him. Montagu's revenge is tragically uncontrollable. After an attempt at abortion proves unsuccessful, Montagu kills his illegitimate baby with his bare hands. Then, he shoots himself. A healing recovery, after the tragic events of Montagu, is possible only with female solidarity. Only in the reconstituted family of women, living without marriage and patriarchy, does Emma find independence.

Before her novel came out, Hays had already enjoyed moderate literary fame with Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous (1793). Hays would savor a long literary career lasting until 1821 publishing political essays and biography. The powerful impact of The Memoirs of Emma Courtney on Hays's contemporaries is demonstrated by their attacks and satires. Hays, with her feminist principles and outspoken heroine, irritated both Charles Lloyd and Elizabeth Hamilton enough for them to portray characters based upon Hays in their novels. Of course, as I have noted, Hays and her heroine blend into one at times, inviting the personal nature of these attacks. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, called Hays "ugly and petticoated" in a letter to Robert Southey.¹⁹ Ty claims that in Lloyd's novel, Edmund Oliver (1798), passages from Emma Courtney are quoted and Hays appears as Lady Gertrude Sinclair, "a passionate girl of very advanced principles

¹⁹ The letter, dated 25 January 1800, is quoted in Ty, p. 55.

who is throwing herself at a revolutionary who turns out to be a hypocrite,” (55). Hays and Emma Courtney also appear as Bridgetina Botherim in Hamilton’s Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800), a satire of notorious radical thinkers such as Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Hays. Hamilton undermines Hays’s radical quests with her transformation into “stereotypical shrew/hag/old maid figure who is . . . easily dismissed as non-threatening,” according to Ty (27).

Today, The Memoirs of Emma Courtney has attracted more commendation than condemnation. Feminist literary scholars have recovered this text, placing it within the ranks of Wollstonecraft’s works. Todd includes a chapter on Hays, together with Wollstonecraft, in The Sign of Angellica. Mellor mentions the novel in her chapter on the “rational woman” promoted in the new tradition of women’s writing by feminists like Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Williams. Ty devotes a chapter in her study of five revolutionary women writers to this work, noting how linguistic and professional restrictions as well as sexual repression operates in the story. In my feminist reading of this novel, I focus on the dysfunctional family structures, Emma’s unrestrained expression of her sexual passion, and her struggles to maintain independence and construct a stable female subjectivity.

Amelia Alderson Opie (1769-1853) and

Adeline Mowbray; Or, The Mother and Daughter (1804)

A sense of ambiguity overwhelms interpretations of both the life of Amelia Alderson Opie and her writing. Though known for her conservative appeal, moral didactic tales, and Quakerism, Amelia Alderson was involved in radical politics. Recently scholars such as Claudia Johnson, Anne Mellor, Roxanne Eberle, and Eleanor Ty have begun to recuperate Opie’s radicalism, aligning her with other Jacobin authors. Eberle, in particular, defensively devotes much of her essay to firmly establishing Opie’s radical political

sympathies and reads the novel as a corrective to Godwin's damaging portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft with whom Opie was close ("Adeline"). Opie's political interests were guided by her father, Dr. Alderson, a physician who was an ardent supporter of radical politics. Opie's birthplace, Norwich, where her father lived and died, was an active center of political reform, bringing measures for the abolition of slavery, the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and the reform of the House of Commons to the forefront.²⁰ In Norwich was also one of the most active branches of the Corresponding Society. Apparently, Dr. Alderson was a leading member of these associations.

The young Amelia Alderson, always enthusiastically searching for excitement, began to attend criminal trials in Norwich, an addiction to which she was hooked until her late eighties when she had to be carried into courtrooms (A. Jones 55). In 1794, this courtroom veteran attended the celebrated treason trials of noted radicals Horne Tooke, Thomas Hardy, and John Thelwall, and rejoiced at their acquittals. Her father and some of their friends had planned to emigrate to America, as she writes in one of her letters, "if the event of the trial be fatal" (Brightwell 45). Though her father prudently destroyed her letters from the trials, there is enough record to indicate that this was one of the most profound experiences of her life. Opie wrote shortly before her death that "The occurrences of the year 1794 have lately been pressing with such power on my remembrance, demanding from me a decided confession that it was the most interesting period of my long life . . ." (Brightwell 49).

Opie was intimate with many of London's leading intellectuals and writers, including Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Elizabeth Inchbald. From 1793 she was close to

²⁰ Cecelia Brightwell. Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie. Opie left many papers and letters with her estate when she died which her executor, Thomas Brightwell, decided to gather together for publication. He found many indications that she wanted a biography written since she left autobiographical fragments. His daughter, Cecelia Brightwell took it upon herself to complete this task. The second edition contains few emendations. The facts about Norwich are taken from page 40.

William Godwin with whom she had a contentious, yet playful and flirtatious, relationship. About Godwin, she writes in one letter, “Rarely did we agree” and, in another letter she mentions current gossip: “Mrs. Inchbald says, the report of the world is, that Mr. Holcroft is in love with her, *she* with Mr. Godwin, Mr. Godwin with *me*, and I am in love with Mr. Holcroft!” (Brightwell 42; 57). Subsequently, she met Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and John Opie, the famous portrait painter, whom she married in 1798. Indeed, because Opie was a close friend of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and admirer of their philosophies, it is difficult to disassociate her from the circle of London radicals in the 1790s. Yet, this is precisely what some Opie biographers and critics have attempted to do. Opie’s first biographer, Cecelia Brightwell, underplays Opie’s associations with the radicals and denies outright her sympathy with Wollstonecraft (41). She reconstructs Opie’s life in order to portray her as a respectable lady, a model of Victorian womanhood, by heavily editing her letters and manuscripts. As Eberle brilliantly observes, Opie’s biographies reflect the cultural climate of the biographers: “Cecelia Brightwell and Lucy Stebbins writing in 1854 and 1952, eras of the ‘domestic heroine,’ frame Opie’s life according to that standard . . . Biographers writing during periods of the ‘suffragette’ and the ‘flapper’ [Clara Whitmore (1910) and Jacobine Menzies-Wilson and Helen Lloyd (1937)] tend to stress the irreverent and radical Opie . . . Not insignificantly, these shifts correspond to a lesser or greater respect for Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication” (“Adeline” 148).

Opie’s inconsistencies encourage these various readings. Though she was a supporter of radical politics and an outspoken intellectual in her younger days, she became a conservative Quaker later in her life, writing only moral tales. Caught between opposing political camps, Opie, and her novel Adeline Mowbray, dramatically reflect incongruent features of women’s writing. As Ty points out, “The inconsistencies and disparity between avowed doctrine and its thematization are indications of the troubled subjectivity

and the complex position from which these women, marginalized as they were in eighteenth-century society, could respond and write” (30). Writing during the period when Wollstonecraft’s reputation was in decline, when writers, especially women, feared association with her, when sexual licentiousness was a stand-in for distasteful radical politics, Opie employed subversive techniques to enable her to express her support for Wollstonecraft. Recognizing its ambiguity, I describe the many ways Opie undercuts her apparent critiques and presents multiple views on the contentious problems of female subjectivity and female sexuality.

After Opie converted to Quakerism in 1825, she edited her works heavily. For example, she took out all the references to men touching Adeline.²¹ For these reasons, I am using the original 1805 edition. In this edition, I see Opie’s work as a radical response to the social construction of womanhood. In Opie’s depiction of Adeline as a sexual woman who defies the institution of marriage by living with her lover, we are invited to question the disabling effect of social customs, institutions, and prejudices on women. Adeline’s vulnerability to sexual harassment further draws our attention to gendered power relations.

Adeline Mowbray, imperfectly educated by her mother, is a nineteen-year old woman who devoutly believes in the principles of Frederic Glenmurray, a radical author modelled on William Godwin who proposes to dismantle the institution of marriage. She meets him while being customarily introduced and displayed on the marriage market scene at Bath and eventually they fall in love. Since his theories are problematic in practice and he recognizes the consequences of following them, he insists on marrying, but she naively refuses, using his published arguments against him. Adeline struggles with the marriage question, especially when she is pregnant, at times being persuaded by social customs. At

²¹ These changes were brought to my attention by Roxanne Eberle in her chapter on Opie’s novel in her dissertation Redeemed Through Narrative.

the same time, her vain, egoistic and superficial mother marries Sir Patrick O'Carrol, a younger man who desires her wealth and her daughter. Adeline's escape from her stepfather's incestuous attack drives her into the arms of Glenmurray and divides her from her mother. These conflicts determine the subsequent action of the novel.

Throughout her short life, the troubled Adeline is consumed by her attempts at reconciliation with her mother. Because society is not ready to approve of Adeline's actions, she must suffer ostracism, insults, and physical attacks. Often she is forced to defend her decision not to marry her lover, but her explanations fall on prejudiced ears and expose her fallacies. Adeline is a generous woman who, in one pivotal scene, sacrifices her dying lover's wish for a pineapple for the prevention of a West Indian family's imprisonment for debt. In appreciation, the woman, Savanna, and her son, Tawny Boy, become devoted servants to Adeline, while the man, like most men in these novels, disappears from the text. After Glenmurray's death, Adeline weakens in her principles and marries Glenmurray's cousin, Charles Berrendale, who turns out to be an unfit husband. Once again, as we see in The Memoirs of Emma Courtney, marriage remains a woman's only option after she fails to achieve financial independence. Adeline's beliefs undergo further weakening, until she turns around completely. She regrets her earlier life so much that she wishes to die for the sake of her daughter whose life would be tainted. The novel ends with Adeline on her deathbed; in her last gasps she is reunited with her mother to whom she bequeaths her daughter. Perhaps she hopes, as readers would, that Mrs. Mowbray will do a much better job raising her granddaughter than she did Adeline.

With Adeline's repentance and regret at the end of her life, this novel remains exceedingly difficult to read. As Ty asserts, "While this renunciation of her conviction seems to make the novel an anti-Jacobin tract against the new 'philosophy,' several other elements in the text reveal a contradictory view, an underlying sympathy for revolutionary advocates" (29). Indeed, the critical attention the novel received when it was first

published was divided between anti-Jacobin and Jacobin readings. The novel was praised in contemporary journals like The Critical Review and The Monthly Review for its attack on Wollstonecraft's and Godwin's radical theories. Such positive reception can be attributed to Opie's 'safe' reputation. Her second novel, The Father and the Daughter (1801) had been received well.²² The British Critic also recommends the novel, but is disturbed by the egregious gap between "the morality [the novel] is intended to inculcate" condemning the "modern philosophy" and the depiction of such practitioners as virtuous, particularly Glenmurray. Apparently, as early as 1805 many British citizens were rejoicing over the rapid decline of revolutionary principles to which this critic is decidedly hostile. The critic is bothered "by the comparative happiness of Adeline's first union, which was illegal, with the misery of her second, which was sanctioned by human and divine authority." This reviewer was quite aware of the ambiguity of Opie's novel.

Gary Kelly's description of narrative traditions, images, modes, and forms that both Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin novelists adapted for their own purposes helps to explain why Opie's Adeline Mowbray has been received as both Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin:

it would be wrong to say that the Anti-Jacobin novel was completely at odds, either thematically or compositionally, with the fictional social criticism of the English Jacobins. They both tend to venerate the 'domestic affections' and stoic virtues, though for different reasons. They both tend to mount consistent satire on social conventions and social institutions of certain kinds, and on 'Society' or fashionable social life in particular. . . . The opposition between Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin novel was, then, to a large extent, a false one. For the Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin writers together represent the range of ideological attitudes of the rapidly expanding and

²² Opie's first novel, The Dangers of Coquetry (1790) was published anonymously.

increasingly powerful professional middle class. . . . ("Jane Austen" 291-292)

Of all the novelists under study, Amelia Alderson Opie, along with Helen Maria Williams, has received the least critical attention in the twentieth century, though there has been a gradual recovery of this text. This novel receives some attention in Gary Kelly's, Claudia Johnson's, Eleanor Ty's, and Anne Mellor's works, but book-length studies on Opie's writings have yet to appear. Ann H. Jones devotes an entire chapter of her book, Ideas and Innovations, to Opie, crediting her for being "one of the earliest writers of the tale of crime and the psychological thriller, and for providing. . . pictures of working-class life--doing both primitively, but because of her reputation almost certainly influentially" (55). Jones implies that Opie's courtroom experience invariably enhanced her fiction. She concludes that Opie played a minor role in the development of the novel: "Adding nothing to the art of the novel, she helped in a small way to extend its range" (78). Adeline Mowbray's inclusion in this dissertation study contributes to the burgeoning field of Opie studies.

Frances Burney (1752-1840) and The Wanderer (1814)

Frances Burney may seem oddly placed in a study of radical women writers. She comes down in literary history with an unsullied reputation, unlike those of the "female philosophers" under study. Unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, who is treated with unrestrained disdain in the DNB ("one could wish that her love-affairs had been more delicate"), Burney, with her far more illustrious life, is enthusiastically celebrated for two and a half more pages than the former. With her concern for propriety, her role as "dutiful daughter," her attention to aristocratic culture, and her position in Queen Charlotte's Court, we may wonder where her feminist expression lies. And, though she was disappointed by early

loves, she conformed to the codes of female sexuality, confesses to celibacy, and marries happily at age 41.

Burney, like Hannah More, paradoxically supported a conservative view of women, while at the same time she led a less-than-traditional woman's life. Apparently, she had a distaste for dependence. She worked professionally most of her life, succeeding as a writer from a young age and working for the Queen for five years. When she left the Queen's service, she continued to write in order to support her new family. She even entered the traditionally male domain of politics when she wrote an essay to garner charitable support for exiled French clerics. She married under her own terms, refusing an early marriage of which her father approved, and eventually chose a man of whom many disapproved. She bore the financial burden of support for her son and husband while she was married. In many ways, Burney understood the demands of feminists, and she knew the risks involved in becoming independent.²³

Whereas the French Revolution inspired hope for many women, Burney must have felt ambivalent about it. Though she befriended a small group of exiled French aristocrats, including Mme. De Stal , her father ended it because he was concerned that her reputation would suffer from her association with a known adulterer and with French people in general. However, her father had little power to prevent her marriage to one of those French  migr s, General Alexander d'Arblay, a man who was committed to revolutionary principles, fought against Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo, and later refused to fight against England (Doody Frances Burney 199-200). But, while England was at war with France, Burney had to stay exiled in France for ten years. Her journal, letters, and diaries record the anguish she suffered and her preoccupation with the outcomes of political policies. During these difficult years, she worked on The Wanderer which was published

²³ See Rizzo's Companions Without Vows.

when she was 61.²⁴ Though her last novel, Camilla was published eighteen years earlier (1796), she was still well-known and the public had great expectations for her latest effort. The Wanderer is recognized by twentieth-century scholars as her most feminist work and shares many features with the works under study.

Although The Wanderer, her last novel, seems to fall outside of the 1790s by its 1814 publication date, it was “planned and begun before the end of the last century,” according to Burney’s opening remarks dedicated to her father. As one of Burney’s recent biographers claims: “The Wanderer shows that Burney had at least been listening, seriously listening, to the feminists of the ‘90s, to writers like Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft” (Doody, Frances Burney 334). Similarly, Johnson believes the novel “takes up all the most violently contested issues of the 1790s--political justice, tyranny, liberty, class, sex, property, prejudice, reason, sentimentality, promises, suicide, game laws--and attempts to set them to rest” (Equivocal 166). While their novels were published during the same period, in support of each other, Burney’s novel stood alone, disrupting the post-revolutionary “backlash” against feminism, a time when the public was eager to erase the blemishing stain of feminism. Thus, though she was not as outspoken about women’s rights as Wollstonecraft, Hays, Opie and Williams, she quietly supports them in her last novel. The novel depicts a young woman’s vigorous attempts to achieve economic independence in a man’s world. It contains numerous didactic passages condemning class differences, in general, and the excesses of and exploitation by the rich, in particular.

Burney inscribes the complexities of class identity through Juliet Granville, the daughter of a scandalous class-exogamous marriage between an aristocrat and a poor, but virtuous, woman. Because Juliet is “unprotected,” most of the novel is devoted to her

²⁴ The age I state corrects scholars who carelessly assume that she was 62. She was *almost* 62: born 13 June 1752, Burney would have been 61 on 28 March 1814, the day The Wanderer was officially published.

overcoming the “female difficulties” of finding work for a living. Just as Wollstonecraft’s prison asylum, Hays’s “magic circle” and Williams’s Bastille metaphorize the circumscribed space of women, Burney’s protagonist’s wandering indicates the social displacement of women. We do not even learn the identity of the nameless wanderer until the fourth volume. Her mastery of disguise enables her to become invisible, a painful symbol of woman’s silenced consciousness and voice. Juliet, as outsider, yet participant in the lower and upper classes, fundamentally assumes an ambiguous position much like the eighteenth-century domestic servants who came from the working class but lived among the wealthy. But I would not attribute her ambiguity to domestic service entirely. For the most part, it is her status as a single woman, outside the boundaries of patriarchal control, that makes her position ambiguous and allows the shadow of the prostitute to be seen vividly in her presence.

The wanderer first appears as a poorly dressed, wounded, black woman boarding a boat headed to England from revolutionary France. Because she cannot make a legal claim on her family in England, she is forced to depend on others and to hide her identity. Alone, she is the object of curiosity, pity, and to some, contempt. Compassionate passengers aid her upon their landing at Dover, and it is solely upon these efforts that she survives at first. But without friends, family, a home or financial resources, she must maintain her independence through work, encountering many “female difficulties” in doing so. Although she removes her disguise and appears to these former fellow-passengers as an Englishwoman with white skin, she remains without an identity or a name. As an unprotected woman, she shares the same fate as working-class women and is vulnerable to prostitution. In fact, the most perplexing question about the wanderer's identity is her class. Amidst the company of strangers, she defies social classification. One man wonders whether she is a house-maid; others notice her politeness and refined manners. Her contradictory state, of being a nameless, homeless, friendless wanderer, while

displaying her grace, beauty, charm and talents, makes her class position ambiguous. So, as long as she is without family, her wandering is a search for a place and an identity. She can be black or white, English or French, upper class or lower class. But she always remains a woman.

Her talents for disguise and for fluid social mobility help her survive the hard struggle as an unprotected woman. She graciously enters the aristocratic homes of the Joddrels, under the care of Mrs. Maple, and the Granvilles, her half-siblings under the care of Mrs. Howel, as an equal, for she, too, had a privileged upbringing and is an accomplished singer, musician, and dancer. But when she can no longer sustain her subterfuge under the battery of questions by curiosity-mongers, these homes on the same social level are closed to her. Unable to reveal her identity, she is outcast as an untrustworthy, scandal-ridden, “nobody.” She is distinguished from her social equals by her desperate need to work and support herself, distasteful acts to the aristocracy. She tries to earn a living by giving lessons in harp playing, by lace-making and needlework, and by setting up a haberdashery. When her circumstances become more desperate, she can only reenter these same homes as a servant, working as a companion to one wealthy woman, Mrs. Ireton, for example.

We eventually learn of the unusual circumstances that have brought her back to the land of her birthplace after she spent her childhood and early adolescence in France, raised first by her mother who dies at a young age and then by her guardian, a bishop, and his sister, the Marchioness. When her father, Lord Granville, who was living in England, dies suddenly, the young woman travels to England under the advice of her guardian, hoping to be legally claimed by her aristocratic family. Her claim is complicated by her father’s failure in the past to acknowledge his secret marriage to her mother, Miss Powel, a destitute orphan, the daughter of “an insolvent man of business” (641). Fortunately, the bishop holds, among other papers, the original marriage certificate and the Lord’s codicil to his

will acknowledging Juliet as his legitimate daughter and awarding her an equal share of his property with any other children. The bishop contacts the Granville family in order for Juliet to receive her due portion and title. Of course, the family refuses and sends him only a £6,000 promissory note due upon Juliet's marriage. During these transactions, the French Revolution breaks out. A commissary plunders the home of the wealthy Marchioness, and finding the note, forces Juliet to marry him. Luckily, before the marriage is consummated, Juliet escapes, under the threat of the guillotine, to England, where she is later pursued by her "husband" and must wander as a fugitive.

Reminiscent of Evelina, this novel ends happily with all the loose ends neatly tied together. Juliet is reunited with her French guardians, with her half-siblings, and her family. She is given her title and her portion, marries the man she loves, Harleigh, and becomes pregnant with his heir. While this conventional closure of heterosexual union distinguishes this novel from the other four, the novel's gender ideology, sophisticated politics of class difference, and theme of female friendship parallel the novels of the 1790s.

Burney must certainly be considered the most successful and famous of all the women writers under study, a fact to which Dale Spender attributes her own doubt about including her in her study of forgotten women writers. Burney's fame, achieved at the age of 26, is attributed to the publication of Evelina, or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World in 1778 which went through four editions, selling more than 2,500 copies ("Burney"). Though it was published anonymously, her identity was soon discovered and announced. Notables such as Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, to name a few, record for posterity their delight with the novel which they could not put down. Godwin and Wollstonecraft, like nearly everyone in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, were fans of Burney's. Her notoriety led to her meetings with some of her famous fans, Hester Thrale, and Elizabeth Montagu, to membership in the Bluestocking Circle, and eventually to her appointment as Second Keeper of the Robes for

Queen Charlotte, a position from which she resigned after five years with a pension of £100 and a chance to restore her health. Burney influenced an entire generation of women writers. Though she helped establish a tradition of women's writing, Burney "had reservations about intellectual and clever women and was frightened to be ranked among them," as her satirical drama, The Wiltings indicates (Spender 274). Yet, she was conscious of her role as a woman writer and the risks that accompanied such a prominent role.

In her letters and diaries, Burney expressed undue anxiety over the publication of The Wanderer. For one, she had the burden of reputation and feared failure: she had been pressured throughout her career as a novelist to uphold her early success with Evelina. Early on, she expressed these fears to her sister, Susanna: "you can't think how I tremble for what all this will end! I verily think I had best stop where I am, and never again attempt writing: for after so much honour, so much success, how shall I bear a downfall?" (Journals 229, n. 16). Secondly, because of the delicate political situation between England and France, the public expected her novel to critique the Napoleonic regime unfavorably. Burney realized that "Expectation has taken a wrong scent, & must necessarily be disappointed" (Journals 209). Rather than balance her sympathies for both countries, she avoids any critique, a strategy which backfired and for which she was attacked by reviewers. The Quarterly Review found her contradictory affiliations a major fault of her novel. Referring to her residence in Paris between 1802 to 1812, they write:

Now really we should have expected, if Madame D'Arblay were restrained by her feelings, whatever they might be, from expressing her detestation of the gigantic despotism, the ferocious cruelty, the restless and desolating tyranny of Buonaparte, that, at least, she should not have sought for opportunities of insinuating her gratitude for the blessings, the tender mercies which France enjoyed under the dominion of that tyger. . . .

(Journals 564)

Indeed, Burney was unfortunately going to be right. The British Critic attributed their disappointment with the novel to their expectations of Burney's former reputation which was compounded by her length of absence from the literary scene, and to her vantage point from residing in France. The critic also criticized Burney for "her impartiality between the rival nations."²⁵

Burney's anxieties increased when advanced copies were distributed without her knowledge for which she reprimanded Longman & Co.: "The work must unavoidably risk unfair censures by being seen thus partially; & the sale will undoubtedly be injured by thus prematurely satisfying curiosity" (Journals 237). When the attacks on the novel were published, she blamed this incident: "I attribute [the bad reviews] to the false expectation universally spread that the Book would be a picture of France--as well as to the astonishing *éclat* of [a] work of 5 Volumes being *all* bespoken before it was published" (Journals 478-79). She was also upset that these advance copies were printed without her dedication to her father in which she explained many necessary circumstances regarding the composition of the novel and addressed the public's expectations.

Despite Burney's anxieties, she expected a huge success, comparable to the popularity and praise of Evelina and the financial rewards of Camilla, which is rumored to have earned her £3,000, raised entirely by subscription. With the help of her brother Charles, who acted as her agent, and her nephew, Martin, she first attracted the attention of London's major publishers and then negotiated with the highest bidders, Longman & Co., for over four months. She was a capable negotiator, often directing her brother's correspondence with Longman & Co. She contracted to receive £1500 in three installments for the first edition printing of 3,000 copies and £1500 for five subsequent editions each

²⁵ The British Critic (April 1814).

with a run of 1,000 copies: £500 for the second and £250 for the third through sixth editions. She anticipated earning £3,000 by selling all 8,000 copies, an amount that would be successful even by today's standards. As it turned out, she had reason to believe this was possible when the first edition sold out before the book came out in March 1814, and 800 additional copies were ordered. A second printing was run. Burney's joy, however, would soon turn to disappointment. Over half of the ordered copies were canceled, though a little more than half were sold by the summer of 1814. Over the next ten years, only 74 copies would be bought (Doody, Introduction xxxviii). The novel was left virtually unnoticed until the 1980s. The Wanderer, along with her other work, has been carelessly dismissed by scholars: the DNB casually calls Burney's third novel Camilla "a literary failure, like all her works after Cecelia" (I:529).

It was not unnoticed by contemporary reviewers, though. The novel came down injudiciously in literary history as worthless because of these unfavorable reviews, mostly politically prejudiced. Some of the reviewers substantiated Burney's anxieties. Just as she feared, one reviewer compared the novel unfavorably to her earlier works: ". . . we should have pronounced Madame D'Arblay to be a feeble imitator of the style and manner of Miss Burney--we should have admitted to the flat fidelity of her copy, but we should have lamented the total want of vigour, vivacity, and originality" (Journals 564).²⁶ In Critical Review, Burney's work was even denigrated for its focus on female difficulties, which the reviewer dismissed as trivial and inconsequential. For the same unrepentant reviewer, Burney's novel indicated the decline of the "era of the novel" established by Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and, ironically, Burney herself. Despite these noisy attacks, with which literary scholars may have been too quick to accept, several favorable reviews appeared and

²⁶ From The Quarterly Review (April 1814).

Burney received many compliments on her novel.²⁷ She was still considered a better than average novelist. With the recent publication of Burney biographies and critical essays, The Wanderer has been recuperated within the tradition of women's writing.

Burney was not only anxious over the publication and reception of her last novel, but was suffering from familial crises, the most serious of which was the death of her father only two weeks after The Wanderer was released to the public. A continual source of anguish was the absence of her husband from whom she would be separated for nearly two years. She left France in 1812 primarily to prevent her son, Alex, who was in his seventeenth year, from being conscripted into Napoleon's army. Thus, the time between finishing the final draft and printing was spent in anticipation of returning to France where her husband continued to work and live. Needless to say, Burney was nervously preoccupied with the war between the two nations: political events dramatically invaded her domestic life. M. d'Arblay visited England briefly in the spring of 1814, once peace had been restored between the two countries, and returned to France with Burney that fall. Giving up his military position in 1802 because Napoleon would not accept his request never to be forced to bear arms against England, the General began a brief career as a civil servant in the Ministère de l'Intérieur. He returned to the military in 1815 to recruit deserters to serve in the army against Napoleon. The General's health suffered and declined steadily; he died in 1818 (Doody 289; 371-72). Furthermore, throughout his childhood and adulthood, Burney's son also apparently caused her distress with ill behavior and lack of attention to his studies.

When she returned to England in 1812 and began working on The Wanderer for publication, she was still recovering from her mastectomy, a 17 1/2 minute operation she underwent without anesthesia for the removal of her left breast to prevent the spread of

²⁷ Her friend, Mrs. Waddington, sent her these comments (Journals 360 n.14).

cancer, and which obviously prolonged her life for nearly three more decades. She complained of pains as late as March 1813 (Journals 102). Moreover, she continued to be plagued by financial troubles and was forced to sell “Camilla Cottage,” the home that was built from the earnings of that novel.

Burney’s preoccupation with these stressful circumstances was fortunate in part because it distracted her from the unfavorable reviews which began to appear about one month after the sellout of the first edition. She told her friend, Mrs. Waddington, that “I have not read, or heard, one of the Criticisms: my mind has been wholly occupied by grief for the loss of my dearest Father, or the inspection of his MSS. & my harrassing situation relative to my own proceedings. Why, then, make myself *black bile* to disturb me further? No ; I will not look at a word--till my spirits & time are calmed & quiet & I can set about preparing a corrected Edition” (Journals 7: 479). In a letter to her brother, she similarly wrote:

I do not fret myself, I thank Heaven, about the Reviews. I shall not read any of them, to keep myself from useless vexation--till my spirits & my time are in harmony for preparing a corrected Edition. I shall then read all--&, I expect, coolly & impartially. . . . But if, when all the effect of false expectation is over, in about 5 years, the work has *ONLY* criticism,--then, indeed, I shall be lessened in my own fallen fallen fallen hopes---fed, now, not by any general conceit, but an opinion That--if the others were worthy of good opinion, THIS, when read fresh, & free from local circumstances of a mischievous tendency, will by no means be found lowest in the scale. (Journals 484)

No doubt Burney’s hopes and worst fears were realized. As she predicted, the criticism prevailed and both it and the novel were forgotten in five years. There is an indication that the novel, perhaps, was published at the wrong time. The public did not want to be

reminded of that embarrassing tradition of women writers (Wollstonecraft & Co.) that Burney recovered in her novel. One reviewer boldly claims that “The revolutionary spirit, which displays itself in the sentiments and actions of Miss Elinor Joddrel, is fortunately for a bleeding world, now no longer in existence; few of our female readers can remember the *égalité* mania which once infested the bosoms of their sex” (British Critic 385). Ironically, Burney regained considerable attention in the 1840s when her diaries were published posthumously, precipitating her decline in reputation as a novelist; she became known to Victorians primarily as a diarist (Doody, Frances Burney 1). With the publications of the massive twelve-volume Journals and Letters (1972-1984), and of her early diaries, Burney continues to gain attention in the twentieth century as a diarist. However, within the last few years, Burney's works have attracted notice for their articulation of feminist thought, over which scholars have begun a debate.²⁸

By now the recurring features of these writers' lives and their works makes the reasons for joining them together clear. These authors and their novels are united in this study by their common political interests, their similar literary strategies, their strange circumstances, and, of course, their gender. Each even experienced the loss of their mother. They each enjoyed popularity and success as novelists, as well as rejections and critical failures. Each contributed greatly to the development of a new form for the novel. Each demanded social reform. Most of them appear in history as minor figures living and writing during a revolutionary time when the hopes for a new age of equality were born. Their novels testify to their remarkable capabilities as feminists, novelists, and spokeswomen for their age.

²⁸ See Cutting, “Defiant Woman” and “A Wreath for Fanny Burney's Last Novel.” Though Martha G. Brown argues against feminist readings of Burney's earlier novels in “Fanny Burney's 'Feminism': Gender or Genre?,” she claims that The Wanderer is the only feminist work Burney produced. In Imagining a Self, Patricia Meyer Spacks similarly describes this novel as Burney's most overt expression of her “conscious resentment of the female condition.” Johnson describes these debates in Equivocal Beings.

CHAPTER ONE A HOME OF ONE'S OWN: FRACTURED FAMILIES AND THE INDEPENDENT DAUGHTER

Introduction

Alas! she cried, is it only under the domestic roof,--that roof to me
denied!--that woman can know safety, respect, and honour?

(The Wanderer 666)

This desperate plea for familial protection against sexual harassment by men in public, asked by Frances Burney's heroine-wanderer, Juliet Granville,¹ when she is on the open road disguised as a farmgirl, is an appropriate question with which to open this chapter. Her question underscores her gendered subject position outside of the family from which she is "denied" access. Surprisingly, the answer to her question, as we shall see, is "no," for the family of all class levels represented in women's political fiction of the 1790s usually does not provide "safety, respect, and honour" for young, sexually mature women.

In each of my five novels, the heroine emerges from a fractured family in which she is brought up without a mother, or a father, or is neglected, or abandoned by a parent. In fact, there is a prevalence of motherless daughters, widows and widowers, and orphans in these works. Intact, nuclear families rarely appear. Families are fractured, then reconstituted with aunts, uncles, and friends taking on childrearing responsibilities. By taking the breakdown of families as the subject of this chapter, I identify a pattern in these novels that illuminates women's demands for independence in the late-eighteenth century. I argue that my feminist novelists isolate their heroines from their families in order to

¹ Although early in the novel she is nameless until she adopts the name, Miss Ellis, and it is not until the end of Vol. IV that the wanderer's identity is revealed to us, I shall refer to Burney's heroine as Juliet Granville.

fictionalize the possibility for women's psychological, political, and pecuniary independence. The type of female independence central to these novels is economic. Without the ability to earn their livelihood, our heroines psychological and social development is limited. Indeed, the socially-imposed limitations on female work and education render our women vulnerable to dependence on others whether in marriage or through exploitative friendships. Female work is, of course, conditioned by class with middle-class women further constrained by propriety. Our heroines demand greater options than prostitution for sustaining themselves. With economic independence, our heroines can imagine the potent possibility of women's greater social and political visibility.

In the eighteenth century a woman's identity derived from patriarchal figures such as her husband or father. It was difficult for women to attain status on their own, even if forced to by unusual circumstances. Without her family identity, she was eyed with suspicion. But as the century progressed, the family underwent some important changes noted by prominent social historians. I believe we can read the heroines' conflicts between their individual and familial identities within the context of what social historians call "the rise of domesticity" and within the increasing visibility of individualism, to which some women demanded inclusion.

Because the English patriarchy was in the process of change during the late-eighteenth century, women could begin to imagine their individualism. Indeed, Trumbach establishes conclusively from historical evidence such as wills, marriage contracts, property settlements, and court cases, that the eighteenth century witnesses the "rise of the egalitarian family" among the aristocracy.² He attributes the development of this trend to

² Though historians may not agree on the causes of this trend, they certainly agree that fundamental changes in the structure of the family began at least by the seventeenth century and became visible by the late-eighteenth century. Lawrence Stone claims that the "closed domesticated nuclear family" emerges among the English elite by the late-seventeenth century. For Shorter, the domestic ideology arises

the disruption of patriarchal master-servant relationships by increased commercialization, to the introduction of family affection by religious movements, and to the decrease of political control which allowed aristocratic relationships to become more egalitarian (Rise 122).

Edward Shorter defines domesticity as “the family’s awareness of itself as a precious emotional union that must be protected with privacy and isolation from outside intrusion . . .” (227). The lessening influence of both community and kin helps develop “internal bonding,” and a more privatized home (Stone 655). In the novels under study, the action is centralized in the home, or family estate, with the family making legal, ethical, religious, and social decisions. As strict patriarchal control declines, there is more devotion to children, allowing for strong affective ties and personal autonomy. We see this explicitly in Emma Courtney’s dismissal of the patriarchal family model in favor of an egalitarian, domestic model: “The ties of blood are weak, if not the mere chimeras of prejudice, unless sanctioned by reason, or cemented by habits of familiar and affectionate intercourse” (I:47). In the late-eighteenth century, a “surge of sentiment” takes place that made romantic love and free choice in marriage partners a priority, increased maternal love, and created emotional bonds for a family no longer interacting with the community (Shorter 5; 17). This development of the “modern” family is visible in the middle and upper classes earlier than in working-class families.

At the same time that the family insulated itself and provided protection for its members, it promoted a spirit of individualism as seen in the growing acceptance of free choice marriages in non-aristocratic families. According to Staves, “English society was changing from a society in which persons were defined in terms of their status, including their status in the family, to one in which persons were thought of as individuals” (122). Lawrence Stone explains that important economic, political, social and cultural changes in

later in the eighteenth century for the middle class, and by the middle of the nineteenth century for the working classes (229; 232). Shorter’s time frame coincides with the publication of these novels.

the eighteenth century contribute to an increasing demand for autonomy and an increasing interest in the uniqueness of the individual (225). Among these changes, both the “secular Renaissance ideal of the individual hero . . . and religious introspection arising from the Calvinist sense of guilt and anxiety about salvation” powerfully influence the “new interest in the self” (Stone 225).

To what extent did this apply to women? Though women may have gained freedom in their choice of a spouse (Trumbach, Rise 97; Shorter 79), they remained dependent upon their fathers and husbands and formed their social identity in these masculinist relational terms. Edward Shorter reports that daughters of propertied families remained home until marriage, whereas their poorer sisters left home for work at an early age. Yet, the themes found in the romantic novel, particularly the valorization of personal autonomy over family control, and the boom in novel publication in the late eighteenth century play a significant role in producing this “growth of self-awareness” (Stone 228).

In this chapter, I argue that the authors under study represent the implications of these social changes for women in their fiction. In our novels, we see this movement away from strict patriarchal influence to free individualism in our heroines’ rejection of marriage, attempts at independence, and their egalitarian models of family life and romantic love. In each novel, a dramatic break with the family occurs just as the daughter has arrived at sexual maturity, a period of time that accentuates a woman’s vulnerability. The sense of alienation and dislocation experienced from this loss of family highlights her unstable social position in a patriarchal world.

The distressing absence of family through death and abandonment in these novels implies an inability of the adolescent female to successfully achieve self-identity within the family. The deaths signify the death of family from which emerges the “new” liberated woman. In particular, the death of the father can be seen symbolically as the daughter’s eruption from a former, patriarchally-defined identity to a newer female-determined

subjectivity. In order for adolescent females to secure their development as self-confident, autonomous women, the deaths of her family members would occur symbolically as they would separate psychologically to create their own female identities. This is the normative process of psychological and social development as teens become young adults. For women, though, the development is marked by “feelings of alienation, isolation, and low self-esteem; turbulent home conditions; and a fear of being left out” all of which these heroines experience (Edelman 51).

If the absence of family means a “lack of future” for the decaying affluent society, as Margaret Doody suggests for The Wanderer, then, in these novels, the responsibility for the future is left in female hands. Without a family foundation, the heroine must create her personal female identity on her own despite her “unprotected” status. Our heroines thus reject a conservative world-view of the “unprotected” woman in which she is subjected to a state of dependency on friends, husbands or lovers, for survival. In contrast, our novelists promote a liberal world-view in which their heroines attempt to dismantle the obstacles set up to prevent their independence, and demand greater educational and occupational opportunities. Our unprotected heroines who strive for economic independence can identify with the working-class woman who is always “unprotected” through her poverty and need to earn a living wage. Moreover, our heroines are vulnerable to sexual assault because they are “unprotected.” It is, therefore, significant that their parents die or leave when the heroines are in late adolescence, a time of sexual maturation. At this stage of female development, women must safeguard their sexuality in preparation for marriage or they risk becoming whores. Critiquing a patriarchal world that limits female sexual expression, our heroines demonstrate that becoming a sexualized woman does not mean becoming a whore.

Our heroines’ maturity is reached when they form female-centered homes and reconstitute their families. Each novel, with the exception of Burney’s, closes with

communal household arrangements that depend upon friendships between our privileged widowed, divorced, or single heroines and their domestic servants or less fortunate friends. These arrangements, introduced briefly in this chapter, are the subject of Chapter Five.

Family Breakdown and Female Formation

Biological parents are frequently absent in these novels. The mothers of the female protagonists, Juliet Granville, Emma Courtney, Maria Venables, Jemima, and Julia Clifford die. Adeline Mowbray is abandoned by her mother and leaves her own daughter orphaned when she dies. Most of these young women also experience the death of their fathers and their substitute parents. These losses impel our heroines toward independence.

Juliet, the heroine of The Wanderer, encounters “female difficulties” that stem from her unusually fractured family. Her father, Lord Granville, secretly married her mother, Miss Powel, a poor orphan. When her mother dies shortly after giving birth without ever being legally acknowledged as Lady Granville, Juliet's precarious predicament begins. At seven, she is sent to France with her maternal grandmother to be raised in a convent under the guardianship of a Bishop. Juliet's father promised to acknowledge this early marriage, but lacks courage and dies before he is able to do so. Because Juliet cannot make a legal claim on her aristocratic family in England and settle into her proper place, she is forced to enter into surrogate families and hide her identity. Exposing her name would endanger her own safety and the safety of the Bishop, as she has escaped from her “husband” in France.

Upon arrival in England, she supplicates the only people she knows, her fellow passengers on the secret journey from France. In her dependent state, she is sent from one wealthy home to another, offering her services and making friends. For example, she is housed with the Iretons to work off their responsibility for her trip to London. She stays with the Howels to help nurse Lady Aurora back to health. After she fails miserably

working in millinery and mantua-making, she reluctantly returns to Mrs. Ireton as a “toad-eater,” or humble companion, under the assumption that she’ll find “asylum safe” from “the licentious pursuit of Sir Lyell Sycamore; the envenomed shafts of calumny of the enraged Brinvilles; the perpetual terrour of debts; and the cruel apprehension of want” (474; 478). Yet, Juliet becomes “fair game” for Ireton’s son who compromises her safety with his sexual harassment. These homes certainly do not provide her with “honorable refuge.”

In fact, many of these homes contain fractured families. Fashionable society, we notice, is comprised mainly of widows, wives, daughters, nieces, and sisters: it is a world where female heads of households dominate. While men appear as guardians and protectors of their sisters and nieces, none appear as fathers. Furthermore, husband and wife partnerships are notably absent. Instead, we have their substitutes. Mrs. Maple is responsible for her nieces, Elinor and Selina, while Mrs. Howel guards her cousin's children, Lady Aurora and Lord Melbury, Juliet's half-siblings. In the case of Mrs. Ireton's household, we see a woman controlling the finances, hiring and firing servants, and taking charge of the duties required to run a respectable upper-class home. We also see Ireton tyrannize over a household composed primarily of non-kin: a nursemaid, an orphan girl, a young, black servant and an humble companion, Juliet. Widowers and bachelors make up the rest of the household leaders. Sir Marmaduke Crawley is guardian to his “two hoyden sisters” (230). Nowhere do we see a patriarchal family structure.

But even dysfunctional families in fashionable societies demand propriety. The nameless wanderer worries about the suspicions raised about her character: “‘Alas! . . . I am in so forlorn a situation, that I must not wonder if you conclude me to be some outcast of society, abandoned by my friends from meriting their desertion,—a poor destitute Wanderer, in search of any species of subsistence!’” (49). Eventually, her silence about her past proves to be too much for the members of fashionable society to bear and they abandon her. Ironically, to avoid the disgrace of the wealthy families who protect her, she

is passed off in society as “a young lady of family” from France. Consequently, to be of “family” is to come from an established, preferably titled, wealthy family. By not coming from “family,” one lacks a definitive identity.

So, just as easily as she is welcomed into homes, she is ejected from them. After she is erroneously blamed for seducing Lord Melbury, Juliet is not only asked to leave the homes of her protectors, but to leave England itself! And she is literally “driven out” of London by coach when she becomes aware of being pursued by the Frenchman who married her because of a promissory note of £6,000 in her name. Thus, in the time before she is reunited with her family, at the close of the novel, Juliet must wander the English countryside in search of protection which she finds occasionally in the homes of cottagers and farmers.

Burney, thus, represents a woman’s intense sense of social dislocation. Juliet re-experiences the pains of rejection and abandonment through the series of friendships that develop and then break off and the families that embrace and then eject her. Juliet must form her identity outside the family. The Wanderer reminds readers of the difficulties women face in forming their individual identities apart from their families.

Like Juliet Granville, Emma loses many of her loved ones through death, separation, and rejection. As we have seen with our other heroines, Emma Courtney’s mother dies while giving birth to her, and her father abandons her. She is sent to her aunt and uncle as a “substitute” for their recently lost daughter. This early attachment to new parents provides Emma with a supportive and stable environment. But, soon the woven fabric of a stable family life unravels, and it is this instability that has profound effects on Emma’s life. In this and subsequent family structures, Emma re-experiences the loss of her mother when she sustains further losses. Indeed, Emma identifies several “affectionate sorrows” that are powerful influences on her development. The first is when she is an infant and is sent to a nurse to be weaned. By this age, she has already developed a

“propensity to attachment” and becomes feverishly sick and cries in anguish over the separation. Most modern psychologists agree that children develop the ability to miss someone when they are between six months and a year (Edelman 33). Emma’s close ties to her family is characteristic of the domestic family visible in the eighteenth century.

Significantly, while Emma is a pubescent twelve year old, her father suddenly appears in order to guide her education. He ends her wild and free days by sending her to boarding school, presumably to learn the codes of femininity. Images of her running, playing, and singing are supplanted by scenes of her sitting immobile and silently crying: “[she] had never been seen to smile” (I:23). While in the past she declared, “I hated the needle,” she is now seen “poring over needlework, and [being] forbidden to prate.” Becoming a woman, Emma learns, involves the self-mutilation and physical control of the female body: “my body was tortured into forms, my mind coerced, and tasks imposed upon me” (I:20). Separated from her family, she becomes deeply depressed: “I was an alien and a stranger;--no one loved, caressed, nor cared for me” (I:19). Outside of the family, Emma reminds us that women have enormous difficulty preserving their self-esteem. Moreover, in Emma’s apparent resistance to growing up is her resistance to her father’s patriarchal authority. She feels little affection for him: “I shrunk from the cold and careless air of a man whom I had never been able to teach my heart either to love or honour” (I:27). When she is finished with boarding school at fourteen, her father continues to control her through education by requesting that she visit his library once a week. His intervention is to prepare her intellectually for future hardship which he almost guarantees she will endure because he promises not to leave her a fortune.

Her uncle's death, which occurs at this time, is the “second strong impression which struck [her] opening mind” (I: 25). When his death disrupts their family life, she recognizes that the “fair prospect of domestic felicity was veiled for ever!” (I: 25). Finally, a few years later, Emma loses the only mother she knows, Mrs. Melmoth, “at that critical

period of life, when the harmless sports and occupations of childhood gave place to the pursuits, the passions, and the errors of youth" (I: 43). Her aunt's death is followed shortly by her father's death. Thus, while still an adolescent, Emma loses a stable family environment and must continue her maturing process on her own through alternative means.

Emma is most isolated at the beginning of her sexual development. She struggles to find a home, scurrying from her uncle's cold, unfriendly family to the warm, congenial home of her friendly neighbor, Mrs. Harley, not quite settled at either place. Eventually, she must leave both homes behind for London. During the coach ride, she identifies herself to her fellow traveller as "alien" and, with striking self-pity, claims that she is "unprotected" (II: 146). Like the maturing adolescent, Emma feels profoundly solitary while being physically and socially outside of the patriarchal home: "I have no home . . . I am an alien in the world--and alone in the universe," and this is when her sexuality begins to define her, making her extremely vulnerable (II: 146). Yet, not until she establishes her own home can Emma's female identity develop intact. The Memoirs of Emma Courtney tells the tale of love, loss and womanhood.

In comparison to Emma Courtney, the heroine of Helen Maria Williams' novel, Julia Clifford, also reaches adulthood after experiencing the early death of her mother, and the later deaths of other kin, in this case, her grandfather and father. Though she is under the protection of an uncle's family, like Emma, she finds little comfort in her family, especially since it has become the site of intense emotional conflict for her. Besides being disturbed by the masterplots of mercenary marriages designed by fashionable men who visit, she must endure her cousin's soon-to-be husband's "most violent, the most unconquerable passion" for her. Consequently, "The knowledge of Seymour's passion gave Julia the most cruel uneasiness" (I: 116; 118). For a long time she must "bear her sufferings in silence" (II: 152). She sacrifices her own passion for the fulfillment of her

obligations to her family: she mutually feels the love Frederick Seymour has for her, yet values her friendship with her cousin, Charlotte, more. Yet, even their close relationship begins to deteriorate, tainted by the illicit passion, only to be restored by Frederick's death. The conflict in Julia's emotional life breaks the only familial ties she has left. Thus, with Julia's loss of her family compounded by her sexual crises, we are reminded of the daughter's unstable position in the family and her pregnable position in society.

In Wollstonecraft's Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria, Maria Venables's life is represented in her memoirs as a series of entrapments and escapes that originate with her family. Her father is an ex-commander who tyrannizes his family with his absolute authority that requires acquiescence and obedience. The children suffer from "unnatural restraint" (126). Her mother is characterized by indolence; she neglects her other children in favor of the eldest brother. After her mother's death, Maria is forced to become a mother to her sisters and manager of a household in financial ruin by a spendthrift father. Her father continues to neglect his children financially by spending their inheritance and by keeping a mistress in the house whom Maria terms a "vulgar despot." Maria complains, "My home every day became more and more disagreeable to me . . . The wearisomeness of my situation can scarcely be described" (137). Maria is "saved" by a rich uncle: he suggests marriage will give her happiness and, without her knowledge, promises George Venables five thousand pounds. Thus, to escape the burdens inappropriately thrown upon her as a seventeen year old, she marries George Venables who comes from a prosperous merchant family and who appears to be a benevolent, hard-working man. Like the heroines in the novels under study, Maria becomes sexually mature at the same time she leaves her familial home. With her own home, she hoped to provide her sisters with a refuge. But, she soon discovers that "in my haste to escape from a temporary dependence, and expand my newly fledged wings, in an unknown sky, I had been caught in a trap, and caged for life" (144). It is not until her escape from this marriage (discussed in Chapter

Two) and her release from the insane asylum that she is empowered to establish her independence and home.

In Wollstonecraft's novel the political implications of the heroine's lack of familial and social protection become evident. Maria Venables calls women the "'out-laws' of the world," a term she also applies to prostitutes (156). She considers all women to be outside of English laws. In other words, through women's lack of legal rights and representation in the state, they cannot obtain or participate with full citizenship. When laws serve the needs of irresponsible husbands who fail to provide women with social, legal, and financial protection, women become invisible in law. Wollstonecraft emphasizes this legal (dis)positioning in her enactment of the double standards in sexual rights that reward men and punish women. For instance, in contrast to her husband's apparent freedom, Maria is sought after as a fugitive, seen as an unfit mother, placed in the asylum, and must defend her lover who is put on trial for adultery. And when female sexuality is centralized in these legal issues, gender clearly becomes the root cause of the prejudices and biases against women.

Women's lack of full citizenship under English law is further represented in the novels by a character's departure to other countries. Maria leaves England to find peace and tranquillity in Italy and goes to Paris to escape from her husband. Adeline Mowbray also leaves her *motherland* for Lisbon seeking safety with her lover after the sexual assault by her mother's new husband. Her return to England means a reconciliation with her mother. In both her position outside of England and its laws, and in England, without the protection of her mother or friends, Adeline feels most alienated and "outcast" (II: 9). Inscribed in these domestic-familial terms, is the lack of legal representation of women in England.

The central conflict in Opie's Adeline Mowbray: or the Mother and Daughter, we see, is between two members of a fractured family. It is a conflict that follows Adeline

throughout her life and deeply affects her adult development. Her mother does a poor job of raising her. Mrs. Mowbray, the spoiled “genius” of a wealthy family, devotes all of her time “to perfect a system of education” for her daughter, while Adeline tramps around neglected and feeling unloved (I: 16). For instance, Mrs. Mowbray reads books about the subject of children's clothing and shoes in order to decide what her daughter should wear. Yet, Adeline interrupts her mother's work by displaying her bleeding feet, which have been cut by stones, and upbraids her mother for forgetting to send for a new pair of shoes. Only the sight of blood on the Turkish carpet induces the mother to do something about Adeline's new shoes (13). Clearly, the contrast between the daughter's practical reasoning and the mother's irresponsibility and material concerns is meant to suggest problematic parenting. This scene has prepared us, even symbolically, for the mother's crucial abandonment during Adeline's adolescence, a time of monthly bleeding and sexual development. Toward the very end of the story, when Adeline's life is coming to an early close, her mother is blamed for not being a proper parent by a helpful intermediary, Mrs. Pemberton. She blames Adeline's faults on her “defective” education (III: 245). She did not benefit from the socializing influence usually associated with mothering. Furthermore, when criticized by her mother for beginning a relationship with Frederic Glenmurray, she replies that she was never taught that her conduct was improper (I: 107).

Though Adeline is neglected, it is not until her mother marries a young fortune-hunter that a separation between the two occurs. When her mother secretly marries Sir Patrick O'Carrol, Adeline truly becomes a motherless daughter. At the discovery, Adeline is filled with a sense of “forlornness and abandonment. . . her mother's wedding-day, had been the most painful day of her existence” (I: 137; I:147). Her mother's wedding not only brings her loss, but makes her the victim of incest. Skeptical of Sir Patrick's honor, Adeline appeals to him for assurance that he will make her mother happy. Unable to answer her seriously, he enacts a role-reversal, asking Mrs. Mowbray for benedictions.

For a moment, the mother witnesses the pairing of her daughter with her husband as if they were just married. As he transfers his feelings from mother to daughter, he embraces Adeline, who violently objects (I: 145-146). This farcical role play is extremely troubling to Adeline, who is cognizant of Sir Patrick's desire for her. The rest of the novel plays out the implications of the role play.

Soon after this public display of incestuous desire, Sir Patrick engages in a final sexual assault on Adeline which forces her to escape into the world unprotected. Because he is "resolved to defer no longer the profligate attempt which he had long meditated," he contrives to return home one evening because he knows Adeline is home alone (I: 166). A few drinks gives him the courage to approach her, but Adeline easily tears herself away from his grasp and knocks him down, which affords her an opportunity to escape. When her mother discovers what happened she vows never to forgive Adeline for attracting the attention of Sir Patrick, and they are separated until Adeline's last moments alive (II:66). Both her mother and Sir Patrick recognize Adeline as a fully sexualized woman. For Mrs. Mowbray, Adeline is capable of destroying a marriage; for Sir Patrick, she is an object of desire. Therefore, it is significant that Adeline is forced out of her familial home at the early development of her sexuality. Through her recognition: "my mother's roof is no longer a protection to me," she acknowledges her need to leave (I: 170). Psychologically, she loses her mother at a time when most young women struggle with securing a separate identity from their mothers. Socially, she is on her way to freedom and independence as a woman.

Incest also threatens "the wanderer." Juliet Granville is nearly forced into a romantic relationship with her younger half-brother, Lord Melbury, when he proposes marriage to her and attempts to steal kisses. At the same time that the representation of incest in both Adeline Mowbray and The Wanderer indicates disturbing dysfunction within the family, it draws direct attention to the blooming sexual attractiveness of the heroines

and to their gender identity. But for feminist authors, the heroines' mature development outside the family moves them towards independence.

The heroines may be sexually assaulted not only by family members, but by non-kin family members who employ them and by strangers. There are numerous times when Adeline Mowbray and Juliet Granville are accosted by men on public roads. Juliet is also pursued licentiously by the son of her employer where she works as a humble companion. Similarly, Maria Venables must endure her husband's "indecent proposal" in which he offers her to his friend: "He assured him, 'that every woman had her price,' and, with gross indecency, hinted, that he should be glad to have the duty of a husband taken off his hands" (161). When these unprotected women are sexually assaulted outside the parental home, we become aware of both the lack of social space for independent women and the resistance by patriarchal figures to her self-created independence. Thus, in each of these novels, the recurring pattern of familial neglect highlights the instability and vulnerability of the sexually mature woman. Our heroines' loss of loved ones through death, abandonment, and neglect impels them toward independence and to reconstitute families on their own terms.

Independence Denied

For upper-class women, personal autonomy was gained through financial independence when reaching adulthood. With the exception of Wollstonecraft's heroine, most of these women are from the propertied classes, and in Juliet's case, the aristocracy. Yet, their class status does not guarantee their social and political independence as women. In fact, as this chapter demonstrates, the families of these women do not protect them from having to seek their own support. Traditionally, of course, marriage insulated middle and upper-class women from having to work by continuing their dependence. In these novels, however, the heroines challenge these orthodox customs by avoiding marriage, as Chapter

Two discusses. Thus, without familial, legal, and social protections, we begin to see their similarities to working-class women. As feminist novels, these works fulfill our expectations by depicting sexually mature women seeking independence outside their familial homes.

In The Wanderer, Juliet's friend, the Wollstonecraftian Elinor is the only female who, by reaching the legal age of 21 and by coming into her settlement, is her own mistress and has the freedom to say and do what she wants. Elinor hopes to prolong this moment of independence by delaying her impending marriage. She tells Juliet: "Just as I came of age, and ought to have shaken off the shackles of Aunt Maple, and to have enjoyed my independence and my fortune together, accident brought into my way a young lawyer--this Dennis Harleigh . . . (152). But when Elinor meets his brother Albert, she determines to end their engagement. Elinor's independence extends only as far as breaking the rules in courtship. She publicly declares her love to Albert Harleigh, theatrically threatens suicide over his rejection, and demands his presence and his opinions.

Julia Clifford, of Williams' novel, also becomes her own mistress when she receives an inheritance. After her grandfather's death, "the days of affluence were arrived, and they were devoted to the purposes of benevolence" (I: 89). But Julia suffers under social constraints to fulfill even her own desires. Yet, by choosing not to marry, she follows a path to female independence.

For women who do not possess an "independent" fortune, economic independence can only be achieved through work, and in this case do women of the privileged classes most resemble the working class. But, of course, these higher ranked women faced complex challenges to gender ideology and had to fight for the right to work. Burney's heroine understands the plight of working-class women: "To acquire that sort of independence, that belongs, physically, to sustaining life by her own means, was her most earnest desire" (146). Once she *desires* work, Juliet immediately discovers that she is

limited to certain occupations if she wants to preserve her femininity. Though “The occupation for which she thought herself most qualified, and to which, from fondness for young people, she felt herself most inclined, was that of governess to some young lady, or ladies,” she is unable to secure such a position. Moreover, her former protectors, the women of “quality,” find this position disreputable and offer to take her in once again (146-47). Juliet manages to find “self-dependence”³ by doing piece-work, needlework, millinery work, and mantua-making, and, higher up on the social scale, by giving harp lessons, and serving as an humble companion.

Hays’s Emma Courtney begins to search for her own independence after her father’s death, for only when she is outside the home can she fulfill her goals. Like Juliet, she wants to put her accomplishments to use as a governess or teacher, but is prevented by the lack of opportunities available to women. She can be identified by Mary Wollstonecraft’s chapter: “The unfortunate situation of females educated and left without a fortune” in Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787). Emma can be understood within the context of the women’s rights movement when, outraged at gender biases, she exclaims:

Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman--*crushed*,
and then insulted--why call her to *independence*-- which not nature, but the
barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? (II:107)

Unquestionably, Emma resents being forced to be dependent and “unprotected,” as she brilliantly recognizes the social construction of woman. Furthermore, she is encouraged to resist socially prescribed definitions of female behavior by her mentor, Mr. Francis, a 40ish old philosopher (I:64). Emma’s self-pity over her unprotected state is met with his approbation: “I had not expected from Emma Courtney . . . so plaintive, so feminine a

³ This is Frances Burney’s term, quoted from her Memoirs of Dr. Burney (1832) I: 81 (Doody Frances Burney 15).

complaint” (I:64). In contrast, he believes Emma has remarkable sense and propriety and should rely on her own talents and abilities. She solicits his friendship but it is disturbing to see her depend on him for her own psychosocial development when she asks him to be her “conscience” since hers is “blinded and warped” by prejudice.

Because Emma lacks a mother who, by teaching her daughter conventional feminine behavior, would normally curtail and suppress her behavior, she is empowered autonomously to define female behavior for herself. Hence, we see the emergence of the radical, “new” woman, defying customs by creating her own. Without coincidence, “girls who grow up free of the traditional social and cultural roles that often exist in a two-parent family may become women who refuse to acknowledge or accept gender barriers,” the author of a recent popular book on “motherless daughters” tells us (Edelman 265). What seems ignorant or innocent in Emma in regard to social behavior, is truly a feminine consciousness work-in-progress. For example, though she finds “the adjournment of the ladies into the drawing-room . . . a barbarous and odious custom,” she is compelled “reluctantly to follow, and to be entertained with a torrent of folly and impertinence” (II:43-44). And when she claims to have “risen superior to the generality of [her] oppressed sex” (II:53), we must recognize that she has developed a critical relationship to gender ideology.

Nowhere is her resistance to custom more obvious than in her feverish pursuit of Augustus Harley. In each letter she writes him, she rewrites feminine social codes by declaring her love to him: “in the very acme of the passions, I so totally disregarded the customs of the world” (II: 84-85). She even passionately reaches for his hand and presses it to her lips during one of their last meetings (II: 141). She takes on a traditionally male role of pursuer while Augustus takes on the traditional female role of the silent and passive object: “My curiosity was a consuming passion; but this . . . man was still silent . . .” (II:26). More so than any of the deaths and losses she has experienced, the rejection by Augustus spurs her self-determination:

the principle by which alone man can become what man is capable of being, is *independence*. May every power that is favourable to integrity, to honour, defend me from leaning upon another for support! . . . I will not be weak and criminal enough, to make my peace depend upon the precarious thread of another's life or another's pleasure . . . I will draw my support from myself--the support of my existence and the support of my happiness.
(II: 100-101)

While the tone and style of these declarations differ substantially from those found in Burney's novel, both texts make the same point about women's social position. In fact, feminist demands for expanded opportunities for women distinguish each of these novels. Like Hays's and Burney's heroines, Wollstonecraft's Maria complains about the difficulty of women finding employment. The obstacles to female independence are discussed in much more detail in Chapter Four.

Like Emma Courtney, Adeline Mowbray's independence from her family ensures her sexual freedom. Faced with the challenge of economic independence, and, thus, personal autonomy, the heroine of Opie's novel begins a romantic relationship with Frederic Glenmurray. Yet, it is his death that spurs Adeline toward independence, one that she maintains by not marrying. She succeeds in setting up a day-school in a village north of London. When she must leave the village, because the truth of her relationship with Glenmurray is discovered, she continues her search for work. Like many women of the late-eighteenth century, she turns to writing and sells a volume of hymns and tales for children.

This independence is disrupted when Adeline finally submits to her promised marriage with Glenmurray's cousin, Mr. Berrendale. Though briefly blissful, their home is soon dominated by Berrendale's dysfunctionality, his selfish and parsimonious habits, infidelity, and irresponsibility. While married, Adeline continues writing, nursing her

daughter during the day and writing during the night (III: 59). However, it is not clear how Adeline will support herself and daughter without Berrendale who leaves them little to live on.

Wollstonecraft's Maria Venables, like Adeline Mowbray, also suffers through a marriage that destroys her sense of independence. Consequently, it takes Maria a much longer period of time to form her independence because of the series of entrapments and escapes she undergoes, including a dysfunctional family, imprisonment in an asylum, and a trial for adultery, emblems of a patriarchal system. Ironically, she finds a kind of freedom that empowers her to write her memoirs while imprisoned in the insane asylum; yet, it is also her identity as a mother that impels her to communicate with her daughter through the memoirs. Like Emma Courtney, she also inscribes her sexual autonomy: from the written notes in the margins of borrowed books, she begins a passionate romance with a fellow inmate, Henry Darnford.

For the heroines of these five novels, the enchanting possibility of female independence derives from their devastating losses of family. These heroines attempt to find "self-dependence" without family and without marriage. As they come into womanhood, they develop apart from their families, signaling the historical change in personal identity from family to individualism. Moreover, in Juliet Granville's curious exchanges of class statuses in The Wanderer and in the cross-classing friendships in the other novels, the novelists capture the spirit of egalitarianism stemming from a hopeful dismantling of patriarchal systems. At the same time, our heroines' desires come into dramatic conflict with traditional social expectations of women, a fictional strategy that draws attention to our authors' dissatisfaction with contemporary gender ideology. In the section that follows, we shall discover whether these women sustain independence successfully in the plans for their futures as they build their own homes and families.

A Home of One's Own

The heroines of the novels under study find “safety, respect and honour” in their own homes and families. Burney’s heroine’s experience emblemizes the progress of womanhood. With her marriage to Harleigh and the imminent birth of their child, we have the possibility of domestic relations that valorize friendship and egalitarianism. Thus,:

Here . . . ended, with the acknowledgement of her name, and her family, the DIFFICULTIES of the WANDERER;--a being who had been cast upon herself; a female Robinson Crusoe, as unaided and unprotected, though in the midst of the world, as that imaginary hero in his uninhabited island; and reduced either to sink, through inanition, to non-entity, or to be rescued from famine and death by such resources as she could find, independently, in herself. (873)

This is a tale of survival, then. Yet, we cannot ignore how the gender of our survivor, an imaginary heroine, determined the difficulties she encountered. By working, she rescued herself from traditional female codes of behavior that would make her a “non-entity.” But, appropriately termed “a female Robinson Crusoe,” Juliet relies on her own resources to create a home. These resources, too, are found “in herself,” and help build a solid foundation for her life. Materially and physically, it’s a home, but ontologically, it is her self-determination as a woman. Thus, through the creation of a unique female subjectivity Juliet is enabled to have a home of her own.

Though the heroines of the other four novels follow a similar pattern of self-creation, they differ from Juliet’s heterosexual union by establishing all-female households. For example, Hays’s Emma Courtney truly triumphs as a heroine when she designs a matrifocal household. She cultivates her maternal caregiving qualities by raising her daughter, Emma, and adopting Augustus Harley, Jr. Beginning her life anew, she retires to a residence with her new family that includes Rachel as her devoted servant: “I had

determined . . . to leave a spot, that had been the scene of so many tragical events [Rachel] has never since quitted me, and her faithful services, and humble, grateful attachment, have repaid my protection an hundred fold” (II: 212). Even in this retreat, tragedy continues to follow Emma when her daughter dies at the age of fourteen. Her newly created home and strong female self-image empowers her to write her life. The memoirs establish her primary role as mother and link her to her adopted son. Though she seems to be sadly withdrawn from society, these memoirs are a public avowal of her personal history as a passionate woman.

It is almost certain that Wollstonecraft’s Maria establishes an all-female home with Jemima and her daughter, and that she loses her lover, Darnford, although only fragments of Wollstonecraft’s intended conclusion remain. Since her liberation from the asylum, Maria has the opportunity to assert herself and to create the terms under which she will live as a woman. Her most courageous act is the composition of a paper to be read at Darnford’s trial for adultery at which she redefines seduction, “claims” a divorce, and fights for the right to choose and live with her lover. In this paper, Maria offers the history of her brutal marriage and condemns “the rigid laws which enslave women” (195) and prove marriage to be a mockery. Her pleas fall on deaf ears. The judge upholds George Venables’ rights and recognize Maria’s defense as a justification for adultery.

Maria’s efforts prove to be wasted if we are to follow Wollstonecraft’s hints of Darnford’s infidelity, actions which closely resemble those of Gilbert Imlay, Wollstonecraft’s lover: “Darnford’s letters were affectionate; but circumstances occasioned delays, and the miscarriage of some letters rendered the reception of wished-for answers doubtful . . . He returns--Mysterious behaviour . . . Maria . . . Returns to London--Expects to see her lover--The rack of expectation . . . Her lover unfaithful--Pregnancy--Miscarriage--Suicide” (201-02). In the final fragments, we are led to conclude that Maria forms a female-centered home with Jemima and her daughter who rescue her from suicide.

Like Emma Courtney and Maria Venables, Williams' Julia Clifford also retires to an all-female household to raise a child. Julia shares the responsibilities and duties of motherhood with her cousin, Charlotte, becoming the mother that she never had. Julia's and Charlotte's friendship supersedes their heterosexual unions for Frederic Seymour's death reunites them just as Montagu's death empowers Emma Courtney. The demented demise of both Frederic and Montagu, victims of disordered minds, is the result of a self-destructive patriarchal society, or as Emma terms it, "a confused system of morals" (II: 212). Moreover, Julia raises the strongest objections to marriage by choosing to remain unmarried, as we shall see in the next chapter: "she refused many honourable offers of marriage" (II: 245). Like the two heroines discussed above, Julia takes in a younger, less fortunate woman.

Similar to the four novels discussed above, Opie's Adeline Mowbray concludes with a depiction of female friendship in an all-female household. Unlike those heroines, however, Adeline is a tragic heroine. Although she creates a home of her own and achieves an independent female self-image, she yearns for her mother and makes many attempts at reconciliation. Throughout her womanhood the conflict with her mother vividly persists in the iconography of the home:

the image . . . of *home*, the home which she once knew, the home of her childhood, and of her *earliest* youth, pressed on her recollection. She thought of her mother . . . and, was struck with the comparative forlornness of her situation
. . . . (III: 71)

Reconciliation and a return to this home occurs only through death. When Adeline's daughter sees the lovely white house and tells her mother, "how I should like to live there," Adeline assures her she will, "when I am in my grave" (III:165-166). Her death is a maternal, self-sacrificing one that she believes will make her daughter's life free

from scandal. And it is when she is near death that she will receive her mother's forgiveness. Before she dies in her childhood home, Adeline beholds her mother and her daughter embraced together and is reassured that her daughter will have the life she longed for.

As we have seen, at the conclusion of each novel our heroines are associated with motherhood, though they have not themselves been mothered. In the late-eighteenth century, with the rise of domesticity, "Women were increasingly seen . . . as mothers rather than as wives," according to Randolph Trumbach (*Rise* 166). Moreover, the "revolution" in the quality of mothering among the middle classes during this period reveals the seriousness of this social role (Shorter 191). Though their identities as mothers, not as wives, appear to reinforce their essentialist roles, these gender differences serve as important ideological constructs. Mothering, in these novels, forms the basis of a feminine political ideology.

In each of these novels, the model of the patriarchal family is clearly rejected in favor of female friendship and maternal values. Drawing from Anne Mellor's work, I would argue that these novels inscribe a particularly female political ideology based upon women's values for nurturance and egalitarianism, in contrast to patriarchal political structures:

Many women writers of the Romantic era—including Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, . . . [and] Helen Maria Williams . . . explicitly or implicitly advocated 'family politics' as a political program that would radically transform the public sphere. They proclaimed the value of rational love, an ethic of care, and gender equality as a challenge both to a domestic ideology that would confine women within the home and to a capitalist laissez-faire system that would set the rights of the individual, free-will or rational choice, and an ethic of justice above the needs of the community as a whole.

Their 'counter-public-sphere' has much in common with socialist theories of the equitable distribution of public goods and services, and should be recognized as a viable alternative political ideology. (Romanticism 84)

In the heroines' journeys from parental homes to female households, in their adoptions, and in their substitute families, the concept of family is redefined in these novels. Our heroines break free from patriarchal families that no longer provide protection in order to seek their own independence, and finally, to actuate their self-determination as women in all-female households.

The Family Circle

In this chapter on the heroines' relationships to their families, I have touched on many of the issues that I discuss in further detail in the forthcoming chapters. This chapter, thus, serves as an introduction to the dissertation. For example, as we have seen, marriage and sexual unions, the subjects of Chapter Two, play large roles in daughters' processes of separation from their families and in their own self-development as independent women. The roles women were expected to fulfill and the alternatives proposed by feminists in the late-eighteenth century, the subject of Chapter Three, are the sources of conflict for our heroines once they are independent of their families. Their search for independence which highlights the limitations to employment women of the late-eighteenth century faced, discussed in Chapter Four, aligns them with working-class women, both of whom are threatened with prostitution. Finally, this dissertation comes full circle when the discussion of the common closures of four of these novels, with women establishing all-female households, continues in Chapter Five, where I introduce domestic servants and analyze cross-classing friendships.

CHAPTER TWO

REDESIGNING MARRIAGE: THE COMPANIONATE UNION

Introduction

how strange and irrational . . . are the prejudices of society! Because an idle ceremony has not been muttered over me at the altar, I am liable to be thought a woman of vicious inclinations and to be exposed to the most daring insults. (Adeline Mowbray II: 95)

Throughout the centuries, marriage gives women of the middle and upper classes a respectability that distinguishes them from whores. Yet, in the late-eighteenth century, women of these classes register complaints against an institution that makes them prostitutes by exchanging them for their family's profit or prestige. In other cases, such as the novels under study, virtuous heroines, like Adeline Mowbray, who live openly with their lovers, find themselves treated as whores. Adeline, much like Mary Wollstonecraft, wants the middle and upper-class mistress-whores whose relationships resemble marriages to be treated as respectable wives. Thus, the marriage plot reveals the instability of and the ideology behind these categories of women. Romantic unions formed outside of marriage become the means with which our novelists critique the traditional motives and practices of marriage. Though our feminist writers attack the institution and portray successful heterosexual relationships outside of marriage, they continue to value marriage and voice demands for its reformation.

The example of Adeline Mowbray, who swings from a radical alternative to marriage to conservative approval of marriage, introduces the themes of this chapter which focuses on marriage for women of the propertied classes. Adeline's seemingly abrupt shift in opinion and practice is difficult to understand unless we recognize the contradictions in gender ideology. Balancing precariously on the boundary between wife and whore, she is

the victim of an ideology that makes women the property of men, that excludes women from social participation, that damages women psychologically, and that makes their sexual objectification a virtue.

Adeline reminds us of the social prejudices against mistress-whores, and at the same time, the importance of marriage for all women. As we see in the quotation that opens this chapter, Adeline expresses her dismay over the insults she repeatedly receives for her belief that marriage is an “institution at once absurd, unjust, and immoral” (I: 73). In this particular case, a former suitor offers himself as her subsequent lover and protector, once Adeline’s lover, Glenmurray, dies. This former suitor, her maidservant, Glenmurray’s acquaintances and relatives, and many others, make her painfully aware that she is considered a whore when they verbally insult her, ostracize her, or sexually assault her. They recognize the mistress only as whore, not wife. Adeline also discovers that the law does not recognize her when she attempts to claim her inheritance from Glenmurray; she is told that she “would not stand much chance of being attended to [by the heir at law] who is neither the *widow* nor *relation* of Mr. Glenmurray” (III: 35). In these strict social categories, there is no place for the virtuous Adeline who devotes herself to her lover much like a wife. The anti-marriage philosopher, Glenmurray, ironically believes that marriage would prevent Adeline’s subjection to these insults. Adeline gradually learns that Glenmurray’s anti-marriage ideas are “so alluring in theory, so pernicious in practice” (III: 190-1). Amelia Opie expressed similar sentiments about William Godwin’s advocacy of free love.

Indeed, Opie reminds us of the reasons a woman should marry when Adeline is convinced of the value of marriage. For example, when Adeline is pregnant with Glenmurray’s child, she witnesses both the distress of an unmarried pregnant woman who is left unprotected at the funeral of her lover, and that of an illegitimate child being bullied by other children. She discovers the need for a legal protector, ironically, when she visits a

lawyer who eyes her licentiously. When she is sexually harassed by two young men who follow her home, she uses “the sacred name of wife to shield [her] from insult” (III: 40). She realizes that marriage can protect her from the daily experience of sexual harassment as a single woman. Moreover, friends urge her to marry to atone for her errors in opinion. These pressures to marry are compounded by her internalization of guilt and shame about what society sees as her previous immoral behavior.

However, it is not until she loses her reputation and her day-school that she begins to lean favorably toward marriage with Glenmurray's cousin, Charles Berrendale, once Glenmurray dies. Adeline feels that marriage is the only way “to recover [her] rank in society, and consequently [her] usefulness” (III: 23). However, it takes a long time for her to overcome her repugnance to marriage and she delays her marriage to Berrendale for many months. Finally, “Adeline kept her word; and resolutely struggling with her feelings, she became . . . the wife of Berrendale” (III: 42). When the marriage fails disastrously, Adeline suddenly begins to view her sufferings “as punishments for the crime she had committed in leaving her mother and living with Glenmurray; and as expiations also” (III: 59). Though we would expect her to regret her marriage, she regrets her earlier principles instead. Rather than find the source of her conflict in social structures, she locates blame in herself, according to traditional Christian dogma. The failure of her marriage makes Adeline realize that Glenmurray's principles would never work in a world corrupted by libertinism and that, until this gender ideology changes, women will continue to be displaced.

As this example of Adeline Mowbray shows, the question of marriage is central to the heroines of the novels under study. Though all of our heroines marry, with the exception of Williams's Julia Clifford, few enjoy healthy marriages. With husbands failing in their prescribed marriage roles, especially as protectors, our heroines must be skeptical of the value of the institution for women. Our heroines' cultivation of successful romantic

relationships outside marriage foster their revision of the traditional marriage contract. Our feminist authors interrogate women's legal position in marriage, support companionate unions, and imaginatively experiment with alternative amorous arrangements in their fiction.

Building upon the tradition of protest of early women writers, audible since 1700 when Mary Astell asked, "if marriage be such a blessed state, how comes it, may you say, that there are so few happy marriages?," (1938) and inspired by revolutionary notions of equality, the late-eighteenth century women writers under study make an appeal to improve the institution of marriage. In a discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Hays, among other female novelists, Anne Mellor claims that "By focusing as much on the failures of traditional marriages as on the heroine's acquisition of a meritorious husband, these romantic novelists significantly challenged the conservative tendencies of a Hannah More . . . with a revolutionary criticism of the authority of the father and husband, a demand for more egalitarian marriages, and an insistence on the domestic affections as the basis of all public and private virtues and happiness" (Romanticism 41).

The demand for companionate unions in these novels reflects the increasingly hegemonic socio-cultural shift to egalitarianism in the late-eighteenth century, as documented by social historians such as Lawrence Stone, Randolph Trumbach, and Edward Shorter. It was a process that owed much of its success to the revolutionary decades of the late-seventeenth century. According to Christopher Hill, the Puritan sexual revolution "meant replacing property marriage (with love outside marriage) by a monogamous partnership, ostensibly based on mutual love, and a business partnership in the affairs of the family" (247). Different religious sects such as the Quakers, Familists, and Baptists rejected the Church marriage as the only valid ceremony and supported divorce. Moreover, Hill finds much evidence of sexual nonconformity, which has always been part of lower class culture, especially among the Ranters who also challenged the

concept of sin in sex. As Hill describes it, this was a time of sexual experimentation and of greater independence for women.

By 1750, what Stone calls the “closed domesticated nuclear family” and what Trumbach titles the “egalitarian” domestic unit, foster personal autonomy, affectionate bonds, and privacy. Thus, arranged marriages fall under attack so that by the end of the eighteenth century there is a rise in romantic marriages, especially among the upper classes. However, these social historians indicate that marriage arrangements were complex. It is difficult to generalize among economic groups because attitudes could differ within one family. Therefore, Stone offers case studies of those who recorded their feelings and left legal documents as the best evidence for each economic group. Stone demonstrates that the influence of parents increased as one went up the social scale. As one would assume, the more property a family held, the stricter the marriage arrangements were in order to ensure proper alliances, legitimate heirs, and the financial obligations of the marriage contracts.

I have organized this chapter according to this shift in marriage motives by first surveying the traditional mercenary marriages that fail and women’s limited legal and property rights. My discussion of class endogamy in The Wanderer shows us how property settlements not only highlighted wives as property, but played an important role in fostering romantic marriages. Marriage for love was tolerated as long as equal social status prevailed. Because of the dramatic changes in marriage and property laws, the position of woman in marriage was discussed, debated and revised. Our women writers contributed to the “war of ideas” in which gender roles were debated; the marriage institution, like the family, became central to their redefinition of womanhood. I devote the second half of this chapter to depictions of romantic, companionate unions as feminist proposals for a new kind of marriage and conclude this chapter with the question of divorce. Our female authors and their heroines envision marriages based upon love and sexual intimacy that prioritize the domestic with families centering their attention on children.

Considering the progress of our heroines' maturation, explored in Chapter One, how do our heroine-feminists reconcile their desire for independence with marriage? Throughout these novels, the depiction of disastrous marriages, the view of the marriage plot as a game, and mercenary marriage proposals prepare us for the rejection and revision of this institution by many of the characters. With women left abandoned by the deaths of their fathers, as seen in Chapter One, or left widowed by the deaths of their husbands, as seen in this chapter, we see the demise of patriarchal systems and the subsequent growth of female "self-dependence." With the faltering family structures evident in their lives, these characters have very few models of good marriages. Thus, it comes as no surprise that most of their own marriages fail. Part of this failure is attributed to the pecuniary self-interest their marriages are based upon. Thus, these marriages signify the failure of the mercenary marriage. Consequently, the novelists imply that a reform of marriage conventions, including divorce and property laws, is much needed.

Resisting Marriage Through Independence

Deciding upon marriage is complicated by our heroine's desire for "self-dependence." Marriage provides them with the legal and social protection they find difficult to achieve independently. Economics plays a large part in these unions. Our young heroines, unprotected women without a fortune for whom work is a necessity, attempt to gain independence before succumbing to marriage. Adeline writes to earn money. Juliet takes on many working-class positions including domestic service. Emma eagerly seeks to maintain herself independently through work, but when that fails she purchases a life annuity which she loses when the bank goes under. Emma, like all the heroines, clearly resents a society that limits women's options to marriage. She declaims against "the customs of society [that] have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman" (I: 71). Therefore, Emma resists Montagu's marriage proposal, preferring to work or die,

until “after a long contest, [her] desolate situation, added to the persevering affection of this enthusiastic young man, prevailed over [her] objections” (II: 159). Her painful awareness of the limitations in women's social position indicates the need for reform.

Similarly, Adeline marries someone she does not love as strongly as her first lover. Though she makes “some vigorous attempt to maintain herself,” she realizes that the only option left her is marriage after her day-school fails because of her damaged reputation. Her failure to achieve independence is compounded by social prejudices against mistresses. Adeline marries Charles Berrendale because it is Glenmurray’s “dying request” once he’s aware of his cousin’s love for Adeline. Glenmurray is conscious of the harm he has done to Adeline’s chances for redemption; few men would marry a former mistress. Opie carefully considers the implications of Godwin’s theories for women and reminds us of women’s lack of independence outside marriage. She indicates that Godwin’s principles of free love would work only in a reformed society, not in one still guided by the principles of male libertinism and by customs that discount female desire. Thus, only when our heroine’s fail to achieve independence do they consider marriage.

Traditional Mercenary Marriages

The marriage plot dominates the novels under study. Our heroines witness the survival and the demise of many different marriages. Their romantic motivations for marriage, in conflict with social conventions or class ideology, illuminate their views on marriage. How we find our heroines at the end of each novel, whether widowed, married, single or divorced, tells us even more about the opinions of women novelists. It soon becomes evident that these marriageable women are dissatisfied with the contemporary English version of this institution where a woman's financial worth is calculated before her desires are considered, where extramarital affairs abound, and where the ideals these women were taught to attain are illusory. The marriages contracted by the middle ranks

emphasized the monetary worth of a mate: “the first and most traditional motive for marriage is the economic or social or political consolidation or aggrandizement of the family” or what contemporaries termed “interest” (Stone 271). With this superficial attraction based on financial gain, the marriages in the novels follow a pattern of false appearances and lack friendship, romance, and affection. In fact, much is missing in this model that only the modern ideals of the romantic marriage can fulfill. These marriages were usually arranged or dictated by other concerns besides individual fulfillment. In fact, individuals, especially women, sacrificed their happiness for their family’s gain. While many complaints were lodged against parents by their children for their lack of freedom and choice and for operating under a system of threat that demanded obedience, the authors of the novels under study seem to (over)emphasize the monetary motive of marriage.

Marriages corrupted by materialism appear in Julia by Helen Maria Williams. In Julia, London social life replicates the values that are priorities in choices of mates. Julia’s inability to fit into this society, with its mercenary marriages, reflects, in part, her different opinion of marriage. While fashionable society enjoys social amusements and activities, such as shopping, calling on women, dancing at balls, attending concerts, the theater, and dinner parties and playing card games, Julia finds the shallowness of the continual stream of excitement fatiguing and prefers spending her time in more intellectual pursuits. And while they participate in mercenary marriages, she prefers romantic love.

The card assembly at Mrs. Chartres’s home, to which Williams devotes over twenty pages, centralizes the literal and psychic discomfort and displacement Julia feels in fashionable society. Julia “found that the pleasures of card-assemblies were like fairy gold, which, when touched by a vulgar hand, turns to dust, and could only be enjoyed by people of *ton* . . . She therefore found that understanding was of no current value at a card-assembly, except to serve the purpose of applying the rules of whist” (I: 57). She changes her seat to avoid the “vulgar and impertinent familiarity” of a gallant young man who

converses with her, only to place herself near some fashionable ladies with whom she is unable to discuss the latest movements of the nobility. Julia has much trouble finding a comfortable place among these people. In fact, there is so little room available to fit the guests and tables that “no person could move without causing a general disturbance.” Players are comically disembodied as bodies bump, arms swing, and voices scream. To add to the confusion, the man-servant spills tea on Julia, and a candle lights the host's apron on fire (II: 32-55). Though the scene serves as a humorous ridiculing of the middle-class' mimesis of upper-class social life, it also enacts the novel's themes. The card-assembly, in fact, becomes the site of contestation where distorted cultural standards that value game-playing, exchanging currency, and following rules are realized. There is no place for an intellectual woman like Julia who opposes such game-playing and social values, especially when they are applied to marriage.

The traditional marriage plot in this novel, at odds with the “modern” companionate marriage, follows the trope of a game plan. The Seymour brothers compete for the best marriage deal. While Charles eyes Julia's inheritance and assesses her economic value, Frederick measures his happiness and falls deeply in love with her. We are privy to Charles's calculating mind as he weighs the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing Julia: “some person . . . might probably abate a few thousands in his matrimonial expectations in consideration of Julia's beauty” (I: 110). As he intellectualizes his choice of a mate, he follows the rules of the game. Female assets are bargaining chips, yet cash is more highly esteemed. Women, then, are valued only in proportion to their beauty and wealth. Even Julia's uncle and guardian, responsible for settling Julia in matrimony, uses the discourse of the market: “Her countenance and figure, tacked to ten thousand pounds, I think, bid fair for a good marriage . . .” (II:16). A “good” marriage is defined by advantageous family connections and family property or “interest.” Charles wants a “good” marriage. He proposes to Miss C--- whose newly-acquired £10,000 inheritance

makes her an attractive candidate, after he fails in courting several daughters of the monied classes: "this union was formed on the wisest motives . . . he knew that her fortune would be useful, and that her connections were honourable; and she, with no less penetration, discerned that his income, joined to her own, would support her with elegance" (II: 179).

Most of the minor male characters from the middling ranks follow the game plan, and contract "good" matches, but end up with unstable and empty marriages. These marriages are based upon fashionable appearances and "sentiments of mutual convenience" in which domestic bliss is not even expected. The husbands and wives are exemplars of fashion and etiquette and cardboard caricatures who have social prominence and propriety. Conveniently, their active, daily social life are substitutes for true relationships. Through Julia's experience, Williams ridicules not only the vanity, insensitivity, and insipidity of the women of London's fashionable society, but their method of contracting marriages. Rather than end the novel with the conventional closure of marriage to demonstrate the continuity of life, Williams shows us the failure of marriages corrupted by the decadent and materialistic lifestyle of the idle rich.

Marriages fail for similar reasons in Opie's Adeline Mowbray. Adeline, greatly influenced by her reading of Frederic Glenmurray, is convinced that marriage is a corrupt and useless institution. But, she needs to look no further than to her mother's marriage with Sir Patrick O'Carrol to draw the same conclusion. The traditional motive of greed operates: "he wanted the mother's wealth" (I: 71). For Mrs. Mowbray, the marriage feeds her vanity. The ceremony, conducted in secrecy and hidden from Adeline, is a mockery. It leads to Mrs. Mowbray's long-lived vow against her daughter; it encourages incest, and it is illegal: Sir Patrick was already married and was threatened with prosecution for bigamy by his first wife in Ireland. Adeline's husband, Charles Berrendale, is guided by motives similar to Sir Patrick's in his quest to marry a rich widow. Berrendale leaves Adeline for Jamaica where he denies his marriage with Adeline and proposes marriage to a widowed

heiress.

Adeline's marriage to Berrendale fails disastrously for pecuniary reasons. When he complains about the expense of his household, Adeline discovers "the sordid selfishness of his character" (III: 47). For Berrendale, even "children are expensive things" (III: 53). Moreover, "being no advocate for the equality of the sexes, he thought it only a matter of course that he should fare better than his wife" (III: 49). He also turns out to be vain, self-righteous, and a libertine. Ashamed of marrying a former mistress, he restricts her to their home while he enjoys visiting friends and dining out. He remains unaware of his treatment of Adeline: "she saw that the same want of delicacy, and of that fine moral *tact* which led him to commit this and similar assaults on her feelings, made him unconscious of the violence which he offered" (III: 71). Their relationship falls "victim to the slowly undermining power of petty quarrels, trivial unkindnesses and thoughtless neglect" (III: 58). After Berrendale "intrigues" with a servant, Adeline "felt disgust and aversion swallowing up the few remaining sparks of regard for Berrendale" (III: 62). Ultimately, "a series of little injuries on the part of Berrendale, and a quick resentment of them on the part of Adeline . . . nearly eradicated every trace of love for each other from their hearts" (III: 74).

The traditional mercenary motive also operates in the marriage of Emma Courtney's parents in Mary Hays's novel. Her father, "a man of some talents, and of a superior rank in life, but dissipated, extravagant, and profligate," marries her mother, ("the daughter of a rich trader and sole heiress of his fortunes") "to make himself master of her ample possessions" (I:8). Her mother, "allured by [his] specious address and fashionable manners . . . sacrificed to empty shew the prospect of rational and dignified happiness" (I: 8). Clearly, the loveless mercenary marriage is constructed in opposition to the romantic love of the companionate marriage.

In each of these novels, our heroines witness the destructive effects of the

mercenary marriage which leave many couples emotionally unfulfilled and psychically damaged. These marriages foster libertinism by devaluing love and affection and by objectifying women. None of our heroines desire unions based on these traditional motives, though they may be forced into them.

Women's Property--Women as Property

Because the daughters of propertied families married to preserve their families' financial security and lineage, their position in marriage is emphasized as property throughout these novels. In The Wrongs of Woman, primarily because of the traditional legal arrangement for women in marriage, there are almost no depictions of successful marriages. Marriages often begin on shaky foundations because motives are problematic. The mercenary marriage leads only to further corruption. In this unfinished novel, Mary Wollstonecraft boldly attacks the institution of marriage and attempts to dismantle the gender biases of the law.

Indeed, the disastrous marriage between Maria and George Venables functions as a vehicle for Wollstonecraft's demands for the reform of marriage and property laws. With his gallant airs, good looks, generosity and superior manners, George Venables makes an indelible impression on the seventeen-year old Maria. A self-defined "romantic," Maria imagines herself in love. She marries George Venables partly for love and partly for freedom from her dysfunctional family: "had my home been more comfortable, or my previous acquaintance more numerous, I should not probably have been so eager to open my heart to new affections" (129). In contrast, George's motive for marriage is the promise of £5,000 by Maria's wealthy uncle who is partial to her. George's avarice is just the hint of the ruin to follow. He fathers a child with a mistress, attempts to prostitute his wife to a friend, kidnaps his and Maria's daughter, and locks Maria up in a madhouse. Maria is imprisoned by her husband in order to force her to give him her inherited fortune.

Ironically, Maria's imprisonment frees her from her stifling marriage.

Furthermore, Maria's material value as mediator between her uncle's fortune and her husband's greed affirms her own position as property. George continually demands she use her influence with her uncle to extort sums of cash. Maria writes: "Thus did he pillage me and my family" (158) at the expense of her siblings' secure settlements. This position as property destroys the possibility of affection for Maria. Because her husband owns her body, she must submit to his demands for sexual intercourse. For women, "after promising to love, in different circumstances, we are told that it is our duty" (147). There is a fine line between sexual passion and rape for Maria: "My husband's renewed caresses then became hateful to me; his brutality was tolerable, compared to his distasteful fondness. Still, compassion, and the fear of insulting his supposed feelings, by a want of sympathy, made me dissemble, and do violence to my delicacy. What a task!" (152). Maria succumbs to what is considered her husband's legal rights. Clearly, Maria opposes the laws that "make women the property of their husbands" (196). The institution of marriage is so corrupt to Maria that she chooses not to enter into it with her lover, Henry Darnford, after she is separated from her husband.

Married women could not enter into any legal arrangements and were even exempt from legal prosecution for criminal acts because it was assumed they had been coerced by their husbands. According to the anonymously written guidebook, The Laws Respecting Women (1777), "by marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended; or at least it is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; . . . she is therefore called in our law a *feme-covert* [sic] . . . And her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*" (65;70). Although bound legally in marriage, women's lack of legal protection, their invisibility as *femmes-couvert*, positions them more accurately, as Maria writes in her memoirs, as "the out-laws of the world" (156). Wollstonecraft compares marriage to slavery and prostitution in order to emphasize that a woman is considered the

property of man and is positioned outside of the law. Semantically, the term, “outlaw” links the lives of all women: prostitutes, married women, servants and slaves. As Maria's case establishes, women have few legal rights, especially as they are lower on the social scale. Like the married woman, servants and slaves are positioned as subjects to a master. Though seemingly more free and independent, the prostitute's work is constructed outside legal labor practices, and therefore, subject to the penalties for this transgression. Jemima refers to prostitutes, like herself, as the “outlaws of society” (110).

Maria's marriage is just one of the many problematic marriages in the novel. The marriage contracted by one of the landladies with whom Maria takes refuge from her husband serves as another indictment of the institution. This woman has had to work all her life: before her marriage she was in domestic service and during her marriage she runs a lodging house. Her husband kept a mistress on her earnings, bankrupted her twice and stole her belongings. And there was little she could do: “it was all as one, my husband had a right to whatever I had” (177). Moreover, the landlady internalizes the social roles derived from married women's property laws: “women must be submissive . . . Indeed what could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands?” (176-177). Underlying the landlady's tale is a critique of the legal position of women in which her property belongs to her husband.

A woman's position as property in marriage is also under attack in The Wanderer. Juliet is literally sold like a slave. She is forced to marry a French commissary who threatens the safety of her guardian, the Bishop, because he wants her £6,000 promissory note, the amount settled on her by her grandfather to avoid further claims. Her role in this arrangement is even referred to as that of a “bond-woman” or female slave (849). By being “mockingly” celebrated, the institution of marriage is mocked. Those who learn about her forced marriage unanimously agree that it little resembles a legal marriage and pronounce her free. Juliet herself believes “all these virtuous arguments against her own

freedom, were insufficient to convince her that her marriage was valid. The violent constraint, the forced rites, the interrupted ceremony, the omission of every religious form . . . I am not his wife!" (845). And Harleigh claims that since "six thousand pounds . . . is the wife that he married," she is not legally obligated to think of herself as married (852). Ironically, her family must buy her freedom from the Frenchman with her portion. Because it would be exceedingly difficult for such a marriage to be legally contracted in England, the forced marriage takes place in France. Juliet is just under 21 and therefore subject to a parent's or guardian's legal consent for marriage. By voiding Juliet's marriage, Burney invalidates all such marriages. Burney urges women to cast away the wedding rings purchased with their freedom as Juliet does.

The explosion of jealousy that destroys Emma Courtney's marriage to Montagu is also caused by the position of wives as property of husbands. In Hays's novel, Emma's and Montagu's blissful domesticity is disrupted by the appearance of Augustus Harley, the man with whom Emma was passionately obsessed at an earlier time. Emma's care for Augustus reawakens Montagu's jealousy to a maddening rage which does not subside until he destroys their marriage, a servant-maid, his illegitimate child and, ultimately, himself. Montagu's violent episodes suggest the futility of conventional values that prioritize masculine ownership and property; yet, his jealousy and masculine prerogative are socially acceptable. Emma's reaction to Montagu's suicide note, which seems more like an authorial intrusion, reveals Hays's disapprobation of these values: "These are the consequences of a confused systems of morals--and thus it is, that minds of the highest hope, and fairest prospect, are blasted!" (II: 212). Like Julia and Maria, Emma has independent-minded characteristics that prepare us fully for a closure in which, settling only for affectionate marriage, she is left alone.

Women's Property and Class Endogamy

In the upper classes especially, much attention was paid to a woman's property when marriages were considered. Great families had to protect their property, ensuring its continuity in proper hands. Thus, a young woman's choice of mate was often left to parents, and her chastity needed to be preserved. The propertied classes usually contracted class endogamous marriages: "women would tend to marry spouses from a similar economic bracket, since only they were suitable recipients of the cash portion and were able to guarantee the appropriate jointure in return" (Stone 88-9). Historically, because of England's rigid class structure, the majority of people, with few exceptions, did marry within their social rank (Stone 60).

At the center of The Wanderer is the debate over the role of romantic love in the class-endogamous marriage. Juliet's mother's advantageous match, and the class conflicts it produced, is the cause of Juliet's ambiguous class status and her national and social displacement. Her mother, "the orphan and destitute daughter of an insolvent man of business," secretly married a young nobleman, Lord Granville (641). The differences in their class status and Granville's lack of courage kept this union clandestine even after Juliet's mother dies. Since her parents' marriage was unknown to most people, Juliet is suspected of being illegitimate. Her mother's own brother, the Admiral, is suspicious of the marriage from the beginning, assuming his sister has been ruined by the lord. Juliet and her guardian's trip to England is planned in order to prove her legitimacy and to gain the property promised to her in her father's will. But the outbreak of the French Revolution prevented this original trip. Evidently, both Juliet and her maternal uncle, the Admiral, disapprove of class-crossing marriages. The Admiral recognizes and reasserts class endogamy when it comes to choosing mates in marriage:

My sister did but a foolish thing, after all, in marrying that young lord,
however the world may judge it to have been an ambitious one. You would

never have been smuggled out of your native land, in that fashion, if she had taken up with a man in her own rank of life: some honest tar, for example! for, to my seeming, there is not an honest person in the whole world, nor a person of more honour, than a British tar! and yet, --see the difference of those topsy-turvy marriages!--a worthy tar would have been proud of my sister for his wife; while your lord was only ashamed of her! for that's the bottom of the story, put what dust you will in your eyes for the top! (843)

He blames the class-exogamous “advantageous” marriage for the disruption in his sister's life and in social order, too.

Yet, clandestine marriages, like that of Juliet's parents, were the subject of a law that became effective about twenty years before Juliet's parents were married. The Marriage Act of 1753 legally instituted the social disapproval of class-crossing marriages. The Act was also intended to clear up the confusion surrounding marriage laws. Previously, marriages were contracted in many different ways: as ceremonies or verbal contracts, by professional clerical marriage-makers or by special license, according to Church canons or Church courts (Stone 34). Spousals and verbal contracts were legally binding by ecclesiastical law (Stone 31). With this Act, only the church wedding became valid and all marriages had to be entered in the parish register with signatures by both participants (Stone 35). Giving false information in, altering, or destroying the Register was punishable by death (Laws 40-41). In addition, parental or guardian consent was now needed for brides and grooms under twenty-one. Moreover, parents and guardians could prevent a marriage from taking place even after the banns were made public. The law was firmly on the side of parents, for it threatened clergy with a felony for disobeying laws (Laws 39). Finally, the law was enforced by secular courts instead of the ecclesiastical courts (Stone 36).

Essentially, the Marriage Act “for the better Preventing Clandestine Marriages” was a legal measure against unequal matches. Because matches with propertyless poor were considered a “threat to capital accumulation,” this Act was a conscious effort to limit access to marriage by the poor, according to John Gillis in his study of popular marriages (86). In other words, “it was represented as laying an impassable line between the rich and the poor . . .” (Laws 36). Clearly, then, as Ruth Perry claims, “sexual activity was a question of property rights” (49). And, according to Ian Watt, “strictness in sexual relations tends to coincide with the increasing importance of private property” (qtd. in Perry 158). This Act was one of many that the aristocracy passed to control their property, including female chastity. Consequently, because legal consent was needed, professional marriage brokers went out of business, and the forcible abduction and marriage, or “stealing,” of heirs and heiresses was made more difficult. Stealing was obviously a great offence to those who worked hard to protect their property: it was punishable by death. Yet, quite a few cases appear in court (Laws 7; 293-295). In many cases, servants or the economically disadvantaged younger son were the culprits (Trumbach, Rise 101-102).

The new regulations reduced marriage to a ceremony for a fee. Therefore, since Scotland was exempt from the Act, couples could go there to be married (Stone 35; Trumbach, Rise 108 n.119). In The Wanderer Elinor Joddrel suggests that Juliet go with Lord Melbury to Gretna Green, Scotland, the popular place for Marriage Act escapees, since both are underage and their supposed class differences would certainly not encourage the consent needed from his family. For those who could not afford these fees, or the licenses required by the Act, cohabitation or nonconformist ceremonies were options.

Since the Act reassured wealthy parents of their children's proper alliances, the reins were loosened on their son's and daughter's freedom. Unfortunately, for the poor, working girls, the favoring of a Church ceremony over verbal agreements which became valid marriages made them more susceptible to false promises and unwed parenting. The

requirement of banns for three weeks gave time to the fathers that they usually did not have when forced to marry their accusers who would bring them to parish officers. The increase in illegitimacy in the late-eighteenth century could be attributed to this bann requirement since men who fathered children had time to pack their bags and leave town (Stone 612).

In addition to Juliet's parents' marriage, the influence of the Marriage Act is exhibited in the subplot about Sir Jaspar's entailed estate. Until the fifteenth century, "control over landed property through entailment meant that the head of the family was no more than a life tenant of most of the estates, with little freedom to dispose of them at his pleasure" (Stone 152). Thus, the principle of primogeniture was essential to the preservation of a family's property (Stone 87). After some innovative legal maneuvers in the sixteenth century, heads of families gained freedom and more control over their children who were threatened with disinheritance.

Similarly, the settlements for prospective wives, drawn up before marriage after intense negotiations, ensured power over the family's personal property. After 1660, the typical strict family settlement reduced the freedom of landowners by making it possible "for a man to settle his estates on himself for life, then on his living heir and on any other living persons, and finally for a period of 21 years beyond the death of his heir or of the last living person named in the settlement" (Trumbach, Rise 71-73). Like the entailment of property, underlying these legal manipulations are the restriction of property and the assurance of family continuity through the male line. Male heirs derived their importance from this ability to guard their family's property through the generations. In The Wanderer Sir Jaspar pressures his nephew, Mr. Ireton, to marry because his estate is entailed (54; 531). If Ireton does not marry and produce a legitimate heir, the estate falls to a designated cousin, next in line. Humorously, he has a hard time finding a wife because he fears a woman is interested only in his money: "How the deuce can he be sure whether a woman, when once he has married her, would not, if her settlement be to her liking, dance at his

funeral? . . . It's a hard thing having money! . . . a rich man . . . can never be sure whether the woman who marries him, would not, for the same pin-money, just as willingly follow him to the outside of the church, as the inside!" (530). He views marriage as a "terrible yoke" and thinks "there is nothing upon earth so mercenary, as a young nymph upon the point of becoming a bride!" (531). Marriage without love and passion is distasteful to him.

Though comical, Ireton's attitudes accurately reflect an aristocratic woman's aim in marriage. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's well-known conflicts with her in-laws over the settlement of the Wortley estate serve as an illustration. Her father, Lord Dorchester, attempted to seize control over his future son-in-law's property to ensure his grandchildren's share. Lady Mary describes her position: "People in my way are sold like slaves, and I cannot tell what price my master will put on me" (qtd. in Trumbach, Rise 75). Edward Wortley agreed. He objected to her father's demands because they were predicated on the continuity of the "great family" without considering those presently alive and on primogeniture which turned marriage into a "sale of the women" in which each "makes a kind of auction of herself." Without this bargaining, he concludes, marriage would be based upon love (Trumbach, Rise 76). The aristocracy approved of love marriages, as long as they were contracted between men and women of the same class, social status, and income. Matches with daughters of the professional or merchant classes were met with disapprobation. Only three percent of aristocratic men married daughters from the latter group (Trumbach, Rise 84). By the 1780s, marriages were no longer being made for gaining wealth as the decreasing number of marriages between sons of peers and heiresses indicate (Stone 319). One contemporary is able to estimate, "three marriages in four were made for love" (Trumbach, Rise 97). Clearly, class endogamy for the wealthy is necessary to ensure love without self-interest. Most importantly, the family settlement fostered romantic marriages, though restricting choices by class, by guaranteeing the son's inheritance.

Companionate Marriages: Love as Rational Passion

In contrast to the arranged, mercenary marriage, the companionate marriage stresses emotional satisfaction, long-term friendship, and equality between partners: “the choice of a spouse . . . was based mainly on temperamental compatibility with the aim of lasting companionship . . . the husband and wife were closely bonded by affective ties” (Stone 392). Wollstonecraft believes “the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband” (113). Such ideas about love and marriage expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman greatly influenced women writers like Hays, Opie, and Burney. I believe these novels express the shift from traditional (mercenary) to modern (companionate) marriage arrangements in the middle and upper classes. Our women novelists elevate women’s position in the home by emphasizing romantic love and friendship in marriage in place of the ruinous physical appetite of sexual passion. In this section I offer some possible explanations for the conflict between women’s position in companionate unions and the place of female sexual passion. I read their distrust of this type of passion as an insistence upon a radical reformation of the marriage union into a companionate one.

Assuming that love is a “learned cultural expectation,” Stone claims that romantic novels seem to have influenced the desire for love marriages in the late-eighteenth century. He charts the concomitant growth of both romantic novels and romantic love and concludes that: “for the first time in history, romantic love became a respectable motive for marriage among the propertied classes, and that at the same time there was a rising flood of novels filling the shelves of the circulating libraries, devoted to the same theme” (284). Between 1780 and 1789, approximately 50 novels by 30 women novelists are known to have been produced; between 1790 and 1799, the production rose to about 80 novels by the same number of writers (Stone 285). Among them are these novels with heroines who accept

marriages formed from motives of love.

It becomes clear that love is key to a companionate marriage whereas the “passions” are destructive. This distinction is central to Adeline Mowbray’s repudiation of free love which leads to her belief in marriage. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Adeline believes that “marriage must be more beneficial to society in its consequences, than connexions capable of being dissolved at pleasure; because it has a tendency to call forth and exercise the affections, and control the passions” (III: 207). Marriage, therefore, is an institution necessary to social order and its future preservation that behaves similarly to the rational mind. In contrast:

if the ties of marriage were dissolved . . . unbridled licentiousness would soon be in general practice.-- What, then, in such a state of society, would be the fate of the children born in it?-- What would their education be? Parents continually engrossed in the enervating but delightful egotism of a new and happy love, lost in selfish indulgence, the passions awake, but the affections slumbering, and the sacred ties of parental feeling not having time nor opportunity to fasten on the heart,--their offspring would either die the victims of neglect, and the very existence of the human race be threatened; or, without morals or instruction, they would grow up to scourge the world by their vices, til the whole fabric of civilized society was gradually destroyed. (III: 208-209)

As unrestrained sexuality, Adeline’s “passions” darken her vision of the future. Like Opie in her moral discourse, Wollstonecraft believed that sexual desire prevented the growth of romantic love and friendship in marriage. Marriage is the safe refuge from the power of these irrational “passions”:

Love, the common passion, in which chance and sensation take place of choice and reason, is, in some degree, felt by the mass of mankind . . . This

passion, naturally increased by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its accustomed state, and exalts the affections; but the security of marriage, allowing the fever of love to subside, a healthy temperature is thought insipid only by those who have not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness. (113-114)

For our women writers, physical passion as a dangerous, violent, momentary obsession is usually opposed to calm and long-lasting love in marriage. Thus, a love marriage regulates the passions. This discourse on passion influences Wollstonecraft's revision of marriage roles. She envisions an affectionate, egalitarian marriage partnership, instead of an uneven, superficial and transitory physical relationship. The weak, Rousseauian woman who pleases and serves her husband and cultivates the seductive arts is replaced by the strong, healthy, educated woman who actively raises her children and participates in society. These women writers refreshingly recreate the conflict between these shifting roles.

The conflict between love and unruly sexual passion is evident in Julia where we can read the desire for a companionate union behind the extraordinary display of destructive passion of Frederick Seymour for Julia. Whereas reason is valorized as curative, passion is condemned in the discourse of disease: "Alas! the distempered heart, when it has suffered the disorders of passion to gain strength, can find no balsam in nature to heal their malignancy; no remedy but death," (II: 238-39). Frederick's death, attributed to passion, is the basis of a warning: "Let those who possess the talents, or the virtues . . . avoid similar wretchedness, by guarding their minds against the influence of passion; since, if it be once suffered to acquire an undue ascendancy [sic] over reason, we shall in vain attempt to controul its power" (II: 208). By privileging rational self-control, and gendering it female, Williams condemns masculine impulse. This fearful warning against illicit passion

serves as a reminder of the double standard of chastity in sex-segregated marriage roles. Williams insists on a new standard of male chastity that precedes Wollstonecraft's similar proposal in Vindication and coincides with the rise of egalitarianism.

But, why does Williams suggest, by borrowing from Dr. Gregory's Legacy to His Daughters, that women also need to regulate their passion because they do not have distractions like men do in “business . . . pleasure and riot” (II:239) when Julia turns out to be a model of female virtue who resists the fatal passion? As one of the most virtuous, intelligent and sensible characters, she is virtually blameless for being an object of passion. Traditional representations of female nature stand in sharp contrast to Julia, who extraordinarily exhibits the self-control, reason, and common sense women supposedly lack. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her review of Julia in Analytical Review noted that “a reader, with the least discernment, must soon perceive that Julia's principles are so fixed that nothing can tempt her to act wrong; and as she appears like a rock, against which the waves vainly beat, no anxiety will be felt for her safety;—she is viewed with respect, and left very tranquilly to quiet her feelings, because it cannot be called a contest” (Todd, Collected Works VII: 252-253). The conventional gender distinctions are reversed in the novel with Frederick's uncontrolled and unreasonable passion and Julia's rational resistance. Women, thus, appear to have a moral superiority and a reasoning capacity. Williams blames Dr. Gregory's ridiculously limited gender roles for Julia's misery. Because women “must bear their sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied” their indulgences of passion without reason can also lead to death (II: 239-40). These prescribed roles are also at fault for the lack of educational and employment opportunities that allow “self-dependence” for women. The passions are disapproved for their destructive effects and blamed for women's subordinate position in society.

Williams's moralizing tone can be read in the context of what Anne Mellor calls Wollstonecraft's “revolutionary feminine Romanticism,” in Vindication, a philosophy that

promotes a new ideal heroine who thinks and feels, acts cautiously, and avoids the dangers of sexual desire (Romanticism 40). Mellor believes “Williams firmly endorsed the enduring domestic affections over unlicensed sexual passion as the basis of true love and benevolence” (48). For feminists, passion is acceptable as long as it is based upon love and is part of the companionate marriage. Outside of marriage, as Julia demonstrates, passion is a powerful corrupting force that can destroy marriages and lives.

Mellor and other critics who pay scant attention to the novel are apparently undisturbed by the seemingly contradictory nature of Williams’s messages. Claudia Johnson, however, reminds us that radical woman novelists employ subversive techniques that draw attention away from their political positions. Using this form of self-censorship during a time of increasing suppression of radical ideas made Williams’s novel more acceptable to her audience. As I documented in my introduction to this dissertation, Julia received many favorable reviews.

We can also read Williams’s warning and the appeal to reason within the context of the last poem that appears in the novel, “The Bastille, A Vision.” The poem’s subject is evidence of Williams’s sympathies for the French revolution and is characteristic of political novels. Williams would come to know firsthand what it was like to be imprisoned when she and her family were sent to the Luxembourg prison around 1795 during France’s conflicts with England. The poem tells the story of a British man imprisoned unjustly in the Bastille, envisioning the revolutionary possibility of “millions with according mind,/ Who claim the rights of human kind” (II: 221).¹ This prophetic vision is characteristic of Romantic poetry, particularly William Blake’s. The poem records the imagined dialog between the prisoner and “an awful form” who shows him the future, beginning with the fall of the Bastille when “this dark pile in chaos lies” (II:221). This vision of an egalitarian

¹ The revolution is set in the future because the actions in the novel take place during the time of the American war, about 1776-1777.

society concludes with an address to "Philosophy:"

'Tis thine all human wrongs to heal,
'Tis thine to love all nature's weal;
To give each gen'rous purpose birth,
And renovate the gladden'd earth. (II: 223)

Like many of the supporters of the French Revolution, Williams desperately believed in the power of humanity and reason to overcome the passions that led to social inequities.

For our women writers, it is obvious that love and friendship, rather than passion as sexual desire, are the bases of marital relationships. Such ideas were common in the late-eighteenth century as we see in the many "warnings" to young women to avoid being fooled by their lovers' passion, for lovers did not make husbands. Yet, as we shall see in Chapter Three, our novels include women who are empowered by their sexuality. In fact, such women are what make these novels revolutionary. Consequently, our authors' attitudes toward passion and sexuality becomes increasingly ambiguous when we remember that Wollstonecraft and Williams rejected marriage and lived openly with their lovers, while Hays publicly expressed her desire for a man and Burney married at 41. In this chapter, I emphasize that these women novelists were preoccupied with the social, economic, legal, and political position of women which affected their roles as wives, workers, and mothers. These novels reflect the working out of their conflicted thoughts on love, sexuality, marriage, and family. I have limited my discussion in this section to the curiously characteristic opposition between love and passion in marriage that we see in late-eighteenth century culture and in these writers' works.

The Romantic Marriage Plot

Although our authors registered conflict over love and passion, they firmly endorsed marriages based upon romantic love, a common belief in all these novels. The

romantic marriage plot firmly contests the prevalence of traditional mercenary marriages in all the novels under study. As we have seen, romantic love, as sexual fulfillment and affection, is a defining feature of a healthy relationship and of marriage. Our heroines fall in love/marry for love and prefer the egalitarian model of marriage. Julia, for example, refuses one marriage proposal because: "Her heart, delicate, yet fervent in its affections, capable of the purest attachment, revolted at the idea of marrying where she did not love . . ." (I: 188).

Romantic love is the subject of one of many poems Williams interspersed throughout Julia. We are presented with traditional pastoral Scottish poetry: a song by a lover followed by a ballad by his beloved, in which both express their feelings about their temporary separation. With the lover stationed in colonial India, both question whether their separation is worth the material advantages. He asks: "Can all the wealth of India's coast/ Atone for years in absence lost?" And she demands: "toil for gold no more! Our love a dearer pleasure gave . . ." (I: 152; 154). These lyrics clearly comment on the distorted cultural values present in the novel that place "wealth" and "gold" before love in marriage.

Forbidden love preoccupies a letter that one character receives in which he is informed of his brother's brave death fighting the American revolutionaries. In the detailed account of his brother's military career that follows we learn of his love for a young American woman, Sophia Herbert. Sophia's and the soldier's love grows from the smoldering ashes of her town, Norfolk, Virginia, burned to the ground by the English. Though her and her lover's countries are at war with each other, Sophia "determined to adhere inviolably to those engagements on which all her hopes of happiness depended, and which had received the sanction of parental authority" (I:258). Like the iconoclastic Julia, the displaced English soldier on foreign (American) soil adheres to a newer model of marriage involving love and passion. Though wartime actions take the English soldier

from his beloved Sophia, separating them, they are forever united in love. Subsequently Sophia goes insane with grief when she learns of his death. Strategically setting this novel during the time of the American revolution, Williams insists on a revolution in romantic love as she fights a war against the loveless marriage.

Like Williams, Wollstonecraft also attempts to redefine the marriage contract in her novel. When Darnford is charged with seduction and adultery by Maria's husband, it is significant that Maria, conducting the defense herself, instructs the counsel "to plead guilty to the charge of adultery; but to deny that of seduction" (194). Implicit in her denial of seduction is her argument for women's freedom of choice; the trial is about her rights to live with her lover and to redefine marriage. They refuse to marry officially: "her conduct would be just the same without the ceremony as with it, and her expectations from him not less firm" (193). For Maria, marriage, not illicit cohabitation, is immoral (193). Maria defends the sexually-fulfilling partnership in marriage. Furthermore, like Wollstonecraft, she is guided by her beliefs in favor of the romantic love for she "could not coquet with a man without loving him a little" (156). Marriage is unacceptable until these demands of equality and romantic love are met.

Maria's uncle, as a member of the propertied classes, also advocates romantic love in the egalitarian marriage: "I am far from thinking that a woman, once married, ought to consider the engagement as indissoluble . . . in case her husband merits neither her love, nor esteem (157). His championing of a woman's right to separate from her husband encourages Maria. Except for her uncle's allegiance, the companionate marriage is not socially or legally accepted in this novel. More common are the views of the judge, who, in the case against Darnford, "alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and the new-fangled notions which incroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life-- and, if

women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality” (198-199).

We also hear Wollstonecraft's desire for the companionate marriage in a letter dated 11 May, 1787 to her sister, Everina, when she condemns British marriage customs of all classes for the “motives which induce [people] to marry. They look not for a companion, and are seldom alone together but in bed . . .” (Wardle 150). At an early age, Wollstonecraft “resolved never to marry for interested motives, or to endure a life of dependence” (4 September, 1796, Wardle 385). Hence, she had difficulty justifying her marriage to Godwin to their friend, Amelia Alderson (Opie). She explains in a 11 April, 1797 letter that she wished “to have some person with similar pursuits, bound to me by affection” (Wardle 314). In her relationship with William Godwin, Wollstonecraft experienced passionate sexual intimacy. Often she cryptically referred to their love life in letters: “It is not rapture.--It is a sublime tranquillity. I have felt it in your arms.--Hush!. . . these confessions should only be uttered--you know where, when the curtains are up--and all the world shut out--” (4 October, 1796, Wardle 354). When referring to the previous night, her “recollections--very dear, called forth the blush of pleasure” (13 November, 1796, Wardle 360). Antithetical to this relationship is the economically advantageous kind deemed acceptable by a society which exploits women. She rejects a marriage proposal from a friend of Joseph Johnson's because it seems like “*prostituting* my person for a maintenance” (c. late 1795, Wardle 327).

For Wollstonecraft, the companionate marriage could come about only through a reform of the system of education for women and of social practices or values such as the lack of male chastity. Thus, Vindication is an argument for the companionate marriage and supports many contentions of social historians who attribute the improvement in female education and changes in social customs and legal codes to it.

Like Maria and Darnford, Adeline Mowbray and Frederic Glenmurray have chosen

each other as partners simply because they love each other. They are unhampered by parental control and uninfluenced by the traditional motives of mercenary self-interest, or social connections. Their relationship is ideally companionate: Adeline nurses Glenmurray and goes abroad with him for his health; he broadens her taste for books and teaches her French and Italian. He feels “the woman whom he loved was his companion and his nurse” and both know “their attachment was cemented by one of the strongest of all ties--the consciousness of mutual benefit and assistance” (I: 184-185, 188). Glenmurray declares to her: “you will be mine--not according to the ties of marriage, but no other ties or sanctions than those of love and reason” (I: 100). Though unmarried, Adeline and Glenmurray develop the healthiest relationship in the novel.

Adeline’s reasons for marrying Glenmurray’s cousin, Berrendale, after Glenmurray’s death are attributed to her value for the companionate-domestic marriage. We know she desires companionship from her husband when, after spending many hours home alone, she poignantly requests his company by the fire in the evening. Moreover, she attributes her support of marriage to having a child. She refers to the well-known argument in favor of marriage “founded on a consideration of the interest of children. . .” and explains that since “the welfare of the community” depends “on the education given to children,” parents are responsible for their children first and foremost (III: 206-207). Adeline, in effect, alludes to one of the central features of domesticity which places the children's well-being above everything else in the family. Indeed, social historians, like Lawrence Stone, have documented the relatively new focus on the child as a characteristic of domesticity. Philippe Aries concludes that in the eighteenth century “not only the child's future but his presence and his very existence are of concern: the child has taken a central place in the family” (133). In addition, there is evidence that aristocrats referred particularly to their children as their “little family,” and “endowed [them] with a heavy sentimental value” (Trumbach, Rise 129). Furthermore, Edward Shorter claims that one of

the three features of the modern family that makes it differ from the traditional family is the nature of maternal love: "evidence besides breastfeeding indicates that a revolution in the quality of mothering began among the middle classes late in the eighteenth century" (191). The modern mother's care of her child, Shorter argues, helped decrease infant mortality rates. Adeline's cultivation of a companionate union and a domestic life orients readers toward feminist preferences.

Like Adeline and Berrendale's union, Emma Courtney's and Montagu's marriage in Hays's novel is promising at first. Emma, like Adeline, is Wollstonecraft's ideal wife who studies "physic, anatomy, and surgery" in order to render herself "essentially serviceable to my friend" and, of course, to strengthen her own mind (II:161). She feels for him "a rational esteem, and a grateful affection" (II: 161-62) which increases with the birth of their daughter. Emma writes: "The father of my child appeared more respectable in my eyes, became more dear to me. . . While I beheld my husband caress his infant, I tasted a pure, a chaste, an ineffable pleasure" (II: 165). With their child, Emma, they make up a modern family. This domestic bliss is brief, for it is disturbed by Montagu's jealousy of Emma's former passion for another man.

Thus, the only truly companionate marriage in Hays's The Memoirs of Emma Courtney that is successful is between Emma's aunt and uncle, the middle-class Melmoths. They "married young, purely from motives of affection Their family soon increased, but this was a new source of joy to Mr. Melmoth's affectionate heart. A walk or a ride, in the country, with his wife and little ones, he accounted his highest relaxation" (I: 9-10; 12). These modern marriages are visibly displacing the older customs that valued money and social status. Instead, the companionate marriage values romantic love, close bonds with children and distrusts passion.

As we have seen, these novels document a rise in complaints by women about traditional marriage arrangements in the late-eighteenth century. While the companionate

marriage and the “rise of domesticity” promoted egalitarian values for women, there was a harsher side to a system that authorized the private sphere as woman’s domain. In The Wanderer, though Juliet marries for love, her circumscribed domestic space dangerously implies that women's place is in marriage where she can be vigilantly guarded. With the imminent arrival of an heir, she will establish her security in the property-owning class. Yet, this security has a hidden cost. While domesticity is dearly treasured, Juliet's world contracts: “a rising family, then, put an end to foreign excursions; but the dearest delight of Harleigh was seeking to assemble around his Juliet her first friends” (871).

The Admiral, Juliet’s uncle, draws attention to Juliet’s confinement as wife which demonstrates his support of those who promoted “domestic woman” as ideal much like the author of The Female Aegis (see Chapter Three). He believes a woman's desire to travel or to cross socially controlled boundaries is equated with a neglect of their natural duties. The Admiral had refused to help Juliet find a way to Torbay, France. Of course, in Juliet's request the Admiral is reminded of the revolution in France and fears, like most British men of his stature, that it will extend to women's rights. Helping her go to France would be equivalent to supporting the female revolution: “women's going abroad, to outlandish places, whereby they learnt more how to dizen themselves, and cut capers, than how to become good wives and mothers, was what he could not uphold . . .” (816). The domestic world in England with its circumscription of female space is contrasted with “cut[ting] capers.” To cut a caper is “to dance in a frolicsome way, to act fantastically” (OED). For women, this image celebrates freedom and breaks down social restrictions. Further, an image of dancing denotes women lifting their skirts, or skirting femininity, and reminds us of Wollstonecraft's dishabille. According to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, “to caper” is a term “spoken in contempt.” The Admiral, like many contemporary critics, fears the “fantastical” ideas of radical women. But, Burney reassures us that romantic love is not a revolutionary, French idea; it can be part of the English landscape.

Elinor Joddrel, too, calls to mind Wollstonecraft's iconoclastic theories and practices. Because she fears contracting a marriage without love, she breaks her engagement to Dennis Harleigh. Dramatically, she concedes that her marriage would "yoke" her to him "for the rest of her weary existence." Had she not been influenced by the revolution to think for herself, she assumes she would have married him out of fear her interest in his older brother seemed mercenary (156). The new philosophies eradicate old customs. Elinor redefines the female role by being the active pursuer in love. She holds the reins in the marriage market. Women like Elinor will not be sold; they will determine the conditions of exchange.

Frances Burney, who grew up in the same revolutionary generation, critiqued the position of women in marriage. At sixteen, Burney was not looking forward to a wedding ceremony: "O how short a time does it take to put an eternal end to a woman's liberty!" Her attitude was constant through her twenties when she "had no 'mind to be married'" (Doody, Frances Burney 43). Doody characterizes Burney as confidently self-assured and "heart-whole" enough to refuse a marriage proposal and to articulate complaints against the trials of the marriage market in her fiction (Frances Burney 42-43). She did believe in the romantic marriage, though, and was fortunate enough to marry happily: "of all the writing women of her era, she seems to have made the best marriage. She waited a long while, but when she married, she did it well" (Doody, Frances Burney 203). Her father disapproved of his 41-year-old daughter's marriage to a "penniless French émigré," Alexandre D'Arblay, and she was criticized by friends, for it was considered "romantic" and a product of passion. The qualities which distinguish her union with D'Arblay, equality and companionship, are the ones so energetically embraced in The Wanderer. Their happiness was uninterrupted for twenty-five years, until D'Arblay's death.

The Question of Divorce

The ideals of romantic love in marriage were visible not only in novels and our authors' lives, but in legal cases around the latter part of the eighteenth century. In the House of Lords, one member argued that men could seek divorce if a wife was a "bad mother" or was sexually unfulfilling. Thus, divorce for men was claimed to be "allowed whenever it was impossible to fulfill the ends of romantic marriage" (Trumbach, Rise 157). The increase of parliamentary divorces, especially during the 1770s, indicates the extent to which members of the aristocracy wanted companionate marriages (Trumbach, Rise 157).

Since the laws of marriage made women the property of men and dependent upon them, a woman's only recourse would be divorce, if it existed equally (and easily) for all classes. In the eighteenth century, wealthy couples could end a marriage in England either by parliament or through the ecclesiastical courts. The former entailed enormous expense,² permitted a husband to divorce his wife for adultery, and allowed remarriage for both, but tried to prevent it between the woman and her lover (Laws 93). Like Maria's judge in Wollstonecraft's novel, the members of the House of Lords wanted "to prohibit the marriage of a divorced woman to her lover" because of the recent rise in adultery. These men did not want divorce to be used "to allow a woman to marry the man she loved" (Trumbach, Rise 158). Therefore, Trumbach concludes: "women, then could subvert an institution intended to assert their status as property into a means of rearranging their marriages and satisfying their hearts; but they were ultimately subject to a husband's caprice; and they always knew that even their kindest relative would have regarded their conduct in another as totally reprehensible" (Rise 159). Maria's uncle compares the treatment of men and women involved in separation: a man can walk away secure in his reputation, whereas a woman is "despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of

² The cost of a divorce through parliament was approximately £400.

mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery” (157-158).

Divorce through the ecclesiastical courts was more affordable, at least for the middle class. It was granted for cruelty or adultery, but remarriage was usually not granted. Formal separations by magistrates were granted to the poor who also created their own methods (Trumbach, “Kinship” 122). One such method was through wife sales in which a man might advertise his wife for sale, bring her to market, or a fair and ask for bids; usually, her lover would “buy” her.

Similarly, since divorce was nearly impossible under existing laws and hardly affordable, our heroines have to find different ways of ending their unhappy unions. In Wollstonecraft’s novel, Maria purchases her freedom by destroying her settlement of five thousand pounds and relinquishing all her property and claims to her fortune to her husband. In exchange, her husband promises not to disturb her anymore, but he later charges Darnford with adultery. He is motivated to sue, of course, because winning an adultery case, which husbands often did, led to separation of bed and board and a financial settlement. Maria’s defense is unquestionably an argument for accessible divorce. When her methods fail, she uses the speech act to enact divorce. Maria tells the judge, “I claim then a divorce,” after she rationally explains her passionate ideals.

Maria’s argument proves to be too revolutionary for the judge who must preserve order against her “French principles.” While this phrase is a blanket term in opposition to change, on another level, we may have a reference to the divorce law passed by the French Legislative Assembly in Paris on 20 September, 1792 which is the subject of the book, Family Breakdown in Late Eighteenth-Century France, by Roderick Phillips. For the first time in French history, divorce was permitted. Previously, a *séparation de corps et d’habitation* was the only procedure for which a woman could petition. Men, of course, had recourse to other legal arrangements (Phillips 4-5). With the 1792 law, the range of grounds for divorce was broadened; the process became much more affordable, and

women were given equal access (Phillips 1). Divorce “was introduced into France with considerable publicity and hailed as a Revolutionary innovation to which no shame was attached; it was a ‘remède nécessaire’” (Phillips 10). Therefore, Wollstonecraft would have known about this law from her stay in Paris: she arrived there in December, 1792. From 1792 until 1803 when the more restricted law of the Code Napoléon replaced it, an unprecedented number of men and women sought divorces, mostly on the ground of incompatibility. Like Hardwick's Marriage Act of 1753, this law secularized marriage. And, it was among the many devoted to the revision of family and marriage laws favoring individualism which included a retraction of Church authority, mandatory equal inheritance and the loosening of parental control in marriage choices (Phillips 13). There are also important implications for women's role in marriage. In Rouen, “women petitioned for divorce two and a half times more frequently than men” depending on the ground(s). In some cases they outnumbered men by more than three to one (Phillips 56-57). Phillips's study indicates that “divorce or separation was traditionally a means of protecting women from the violence of men and the consequences of desertion” (Trumbach, “Kinship” 123).³ In Paris, there were 12,431 divorces granted in the period from 1792 until 1803 (Phillips 4). With one out of every four marriages ending in divorce in Paris, the chances are that Wollstonecraft would probably have had some personal knowledge of divorce and could have included them in her novel a few years later.

It is significant, then, that The Wrongs of Woman concludes with a courtroom trial scene, the site of legal negotiations. In this novel marriage is redefined as an affectionate partnership; a woman challenges the law by asserting her independence outside of the law; finally, divorce and property laws are interrogated for their biases against women. Inscribed within the fragments of Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel we have hopeful,

³ Trumbach discusses Phillips book at length in “Kinship and Marriage in Early Modern France and England: Four Books.”

revolutionary images of women in marriage.⁴

Conclusion

In this chapter, our novels serve as evidence of late eighteenth-century trends in marital arrangements, documenting the demise of traditional mercenary marriages and the rise of modern companionate marriages. Our heroine-feminists debate the question of marriage, enacting both social conflicts and internal struggles about their gendered positions. From the viewpoint of women, marriage restricted their individual and property rights and their social participation while it treated them as property. For propertied women, the marriage contract was a bargaining arrangement in which they were traded to increase their family's wealth or prestige. Wives, as Wollstonecraft and Lady Wortley Montagu claimed, were legal prostitutes. Indeed, as we have seen, the boundary between respectability and infamy was unstable. Wollstonecraft believed that until the law addressed women's position in marriage by allowing her property rights, accessible and affordable divorce, free choice in partners outside her class and redress against seducers, she would continue to attack this institution.

At the same time that our feminist authors condemn the institution of marriage in their novels, they support its revision. The only successful, happy marriages in their novels are those founded on the principles of romantic love and equality between the sexes, and those which develop domesticity. The unions our heroines form outside of legal marriage follow this pattern, suggesting that they wanted no part of the marriage institution as it stands. Thus, our heroines, faced with two models of marriage to choose from, overwhelmingly decide upon the modern companionate union. The question that remains

⁴ In the posthumous edition of this novel, Godwin included many of the possible endings that Wollstonecraft left in notes. In three of the four endings, Maria is pregnant and loses her lover. Maria succeeds in separating from her husband, it seems, but the future with Darnford looks bleak. Thus, we can assume that she achieves true independence.

is the subject of the next chapter: to what extent did the roles wives were expected to enact conflict with our heroines' versions of womanhood and their view of female sexuality?

CHAPTER THREE

RESISTING THE IDEAL: THE FALLEN WOMAN AND THE PROSTITUTE

Introduction

How can I be defild when I reflect thy image pure?
Who taught thee modesty, subtil modesty! child of night & sleep
When thou awakest, wilt thou dissemble all thy secret joys
Or wert thou not, awake when all this mystery was disclos'd!
Then com'st thou forth a modest virgin knowing to dissemble
With nets found under thy night pillow, to catch virgin joy,
And brand it with the name of whore; & sell it in the night . . .

And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty!
This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite.
Then is Oothoon a whore indeed! and all the virgin joys
Of life are harlots . . .

Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793)

Plates III: 16 and VI: 7-12, 16-19

William Blake's poem dramatizes the story of Oothoon, an innocent girl whose sexual awakening enables her to transcend the limitations of the virgin/whore dichotomy. When she is raped by Bromion, it seems as if Oothoon internalizes the fallen world-view of female sexuality by insisting that she is "defiled" and by demanding a Promethean punishment. Instead, Oothoon frees herself from the limitations of perception: "They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;/ They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up./ And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle" (II: 29-31). To

persuade her lover, Theotormon, that she is pure and to enable him to transcend this false consciousness, she poses questions that critically challenge the limitations of human perception and point to the limitless expanse of the unknown: “knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth /To gratify senses unknown? . . . are there sorrows, beside the sorrows of poverty! . . . And is there not one law for both the lion and the ox?” (IV: 14-15, 20, 22). Though Oothoon reaches “the moment of desire” and celebrates “happy happy Love,” she fails to change Theotormon’s view. Struggling against an unsympathetic world, Oothoon, like our heroines, succeeds in redrawing, or rather, erasing, the boundary between respectable and fallen women.

Similarly, in their vision of their heroine’s egalitarian sexual relations, our feminist authors daringly elicit readers’ sympathy for iconoclastic sexual women.¹ While our heroines are devoted to their lovers in healthy relationships, the world dramatically condemns their subversive, sexually-liberating lifestyles. As I show in the next chapter, Burney’s Juliet is “fallen” because of her unstable class identity, not because of her sexuality; she remains chaste until she marries, though she is prone to sexual assault. Although Burney’s novel is discussed in this chapter, I refer only to the four other heroines when I discuss their empowering sexuality. Like Oothoon, our heroines live in a “fallen” world which makes women sexual objects; they are viewed as “fallen” women and even prostitutes. Yet, our authors contradict conventional attitudes toward fallen women by presenting their heroines as pure, virtuous, faithful women. Our heroines are the “new women” rising from the revolutionary pages of Wollstonecraft: they are rational, intelligent, and well-read. And they are also traditional “domestic” genteel women whose practical, useful education fashions them as experts in household affairs. Our authors open up the conventional notions of the fallen woman to include these pure, honorable versions. By

¹ I use the term “sexual” to denote both sexual activity, in opposition to chastity, and to a woman’s sexualized nature.

doing so, they testify to the fluidity of female identities and imply that the sexual woman can be the ideal woman.

Thus, I see the explicit female sexuality in the novels as a form of resistance against the dominant image of the middle-class ideal woman or what Poovey calls the “Proper Lady” and against the restrictions against female sexuality in laws regulating prostitution, both of which limited the expression of sexuality to lawful love in marriage. My women writers reinstate the forbidden female sexuality and redefine it as empowering, as part of their model of womanhood. By including their images of sexual women within the domestic sphere, radical women novelists deflected the charges posed by their more conservative contemporaries that the revolutionary woman would level class distinctions and deprive women of their “power of influence in the home” (Poovey, *Proper* 31-32). They asked, instead, why the domestic woman could not also have desire. In contrast, Poovey, Armstrong, and Johnson do not account for the explicit expression of sexuality found in women’s novels. I also believe that our authors interrogate the widening gap between the gendered domestic and public spheres with their “virtuous-fallen” heroines who are both “public” and “domestic” women.

In these novels, the sexual woman inscribed with domestic virtues strives for recognition in the popular discourse of womanhood. Burney’s Elinor, Hays’s Emma, and Opie’s Adeline are quite aware of their deviation from propriety. For my novels, these sexual feminist women challenge and disrupt the social order underlying domesticity. Explicit sexuality was at the root of an independent woman’s political or economic deviance. For their treatment of virtuous-fallen women, these novels stand in sharp contrast to later depictions of deviant women in Victorian literature who become “monsters.” Poovey explains that “the fact that [the domestic version of womanhood] was reinforced by nearly every bourgeois institution and social experience meant that to define oneself by some other category than the paradox of sexuality/chastity was to move wholly

outside of social definition, to risk being designated a 'monster'" (Proper 23). Similarly, Armstrong explains that for the popular madwoman of the Victorian novels "monstrous women represent aspects of the female that exist outside of social institutions because these aspects constitute a form of resistance that social institutions control" (165). According to Armstrong, the figure of the prostitute underlies the representation of the monstrous woman (182). However, resistance in our novels does not take monstrous form. Our heroines are not defeminized as monsters, but become domestic angels. The closest our novels come to portraying the monstrous woman is with what Johnson calls the "freakish feminist," a figure who appears in novels from the 1790s onward who enables women writers to present feminist discourse, yet distance themselves from it. Maria Edgeworth's Harriet Freke in her novel, Belinda (1801), is such a feminist.

At issue in Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion and the novels under study is the place of the sexually, psychologically, and intellectually fulfilled independent woman within the socially-constructed categories of womanhood. Certainly, as women who transgress ideological, legal and social boundaries, our heroines are situated at the margins of social structures. They register their resistance to these categories in many ways by enacting masculine behavior: they read, voice their opinions, choose their own lovers, and cultivate mature sexual relationships. They break through the gendered boundaries between private and public space.

The first part of this chapter traces the origins of and response to the dominant ideal of woman. My thesis is that the middle-class domestic woman found in didactic prose was formed as a response to specific class conditions and to upper-class lifestyles, or "female education," that made women "alluring mistresses." Both traditionalists, of which the author of The Evils is an example, and feminists like Wollstonecraft recognized the need for a reform of female education; they also both blamed fashionable society for prostituting women. But, each group demanded different kinds of reform and this is where we see a

feminist critique of the traditionalists' domestic woman. Feminists insisted on expanding women's space whereas the traditionalists wanted to restrict female sexuality. The latter consciously distanced domestic woman from the prostitute. The Female Aegis is an example of the didactic prose that formulated the image of domestic woman. An anonymous pamphlet, The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution, provides us with an important framework for our understanding of this tension between the ideal and the fallen, introducing the very important distinction of female sexuality.

The second part of this chapter examines the ways in which female sexuality was regulated by prostitution laws. At the same time the domestic ideology limited female self-expression, the laws designed to control prostitution also succeeded in restricting female sexuality, rendering our heroines' sexual activity deviant. In the last part of this chapter, I examine the degrees to which each of our heroines embrace or reject the middle-class ideal, and the extent to which they resemble prostitutes because of their sexual activity and feminism. My major claim in this chapter is that our heroines can be viewed as women who resist the restrictions on female behavior by the domestic ideology of the middle class, and the similar regulations on female sexuality by prostitution laws, by redefining the "ideal" woman to include the image of the sexual woman. Thus, by aligning our virtuous heroines with prostitution, our authors destabilize the imagined gap between the domestic woman and the prostitute. Similarly, through our heroines' attempts at independence and partial success in the public sphere, our heroines enact resistance to the circumscribed space of domestic woman and align themselves with the prostitute and working-class woman, both of whom work, the subject of the next chapter. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate how middle-class and working-class women are threatened with prostitution by focusing on feminist writings on female education, Wollstonecraft's Jemima who must work as a prostitute, and similar cases from social history data.

Origins of Domestic Woman

The Middle Class

for nothing can be more distant from the plain, sober, useful qualities of a housewife, than the excellencies of the heroine of a novel. (Wakefield 148)

In this passage, Priscilla Wakefield blames sentimental novels for creating heroines who are “unfit for their imitation.” Novels do not present the “plain, sober, useful qualities of a housewife,” but the unrealistic and dangerous qualities of a heroine, who sometimes strives for upward class mobility. However, our feminist authors present heroines who conform in some ways to ideal, domestic, feminine behavior, and in other ways to what that society viewed as transgressive, public, and masculine behavior.

Images of what I am calling the “ideal” woman are found in the type of literature Janet Todd terms “didactic prose” which includes advice books on domestic matters like cooking and on proper female behavior and guidebooks on the education of daughters.² Scholars generally recognize that these books were designed for and demanded by the middle class; thus, their lifestyles dominate the market. Poovey uses them as “examples of the public discourse of middle-class society . . . [which] reproduce the system of values--the ideology--of this society” (*Proper* xiii). She claims the genre of conduct books “was directed primarily to the middle classes and was intended to educate young girls (and their mothers) in the behavior considered ‘proper’ then ‘natural’ for a ‘lady’” (*Proper* 15). In this chapter, I am referring to these middle-class domestic books.

² “Didactic prose” is used by Todd in her introduction (*Dictionary* 16-17). Some critics prefer the vaguer category, “conduct books” to refer to this genre. Designations of “conservative” or “radical” are difficult to assign to these texts. According to Todd, “Usually the advice was conservative, not subversive--although, some independence might be modestly intruded--and commonsensical in its acceptance (and understanding) of the patriarchal reality” (*Dictionary* 16).

Poovey traces this class-based view of womanhood to certain religious, moral, and legal principles. Puritan principles regarded the family as “a unit of religious social discipline” and the home as a spiritual refuge (Proper 7). As a result, women’s roles were confined to domestic duties, though they gained a “new spiritual and socially meaningful role” (Poovey, Proper 7). As middle-class men began to spend more time in the public sphere, the domestic sphere became woman’s domain, a gendered spatial distinction that served capitalist interests. More importantly, women’s roles changed with the rise of the middle classes. According to Lawrence Stone, “the rise of affluence led to the withdrawal of a middle-class wife from active engagement in the day-to-day physical and administrative tasks of the household to a life of elegant but idle gentility . . . This evolution of the London middle-class wife into a status ornament waited on hand and foot by servants achieved its purpose of cutting her off completely from the class of women who had to work for their living” (349-50).

A middle-class daughter was sacrificed in her family’s marriage arrangements to gain property and status. Although Poovey claims that middle-class women united with titled families, offering them liquid cash, nearly all the social history texts I have consulted demonstrate that this was not very common.³ It is true, as Poovey claims, that the daughter’s value in her propertied family could be attributed to the legal arrangement of strict settlement which preserved a family’s estate and enabled a family’s name and land to be passed down. The settlement fostered marriages between middle classes and landed classes, contributing to a rise in status for the middle classes, but such marriages were not as frequent as Poovey assumes.

These legal arrangements illustrate the extent to which the domestic ideal evolved from the middle class. As Gary Kelly writes, “The ideal was developed as ‘domestic

³ See my discussion of class endogamy in Burney’s novel in Chapter Two. Also, see Randolph Trumbach’s The Rise of the Egalitarian Family.

woman,' representing the values and practices of the professional middle class . . .” (Revolutionary 6). However, this ideal Woman was then universalized to represent women of all classes. Kelly explains that, “Woman is defined as domestic in order to confine her there, in contrast to negative figures of femininity: the too public, too political, independently desiring woman of the courtly upper classes . . . and the labouring, sexually available woman of the servant and other lower classes” (Revolutionary 15). The late-eighteenth century is remarkable for its increasing support of this gender ideology.

Class Conflict

At the same time that this gender ideology developed in response to specific middle-class requirements, it was also an expression of dissatisfaction with what eighteenth-century critics called “female education” but what I would translate as social conditioning. Some segments of the middle-class increasingly blamed the idle lifestyle of the upper classes, or “fashionable” society and their promiscuity (in wealth, costly habits, and of course sexuality) for the increase in immorality. This critique aligns such traditionalists with feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft who also found fault with women’s dissipation in these classes. While the former discovered that by confining women to the home they could distance public women from their domestic woman and safeguard female chastity, the latter advocated closing the gap between public and private spheres.

Feminists exposed the harmful effects of conforming to the “female education” of the upper classes and its prevailing gender ideology: Wollstonecraft observes that “This desire of being always women, is the very consciousness that degrades the sex” and she asks, “why is the life of a modest woman a perpetual conflict? I should answer, that this very system of education makes it so” (Wollstonecraft 177; 199). Drawing upon Rousseau, Wollstonecraft also critiqued the system of female education for educating women to be dependent on men, and to serve and please them. According to Wakefield,

this system kept women in a “feeble, sickly, languid state,” by denying them the benefits of exercise and outdoor activity (20). Such an education prevented women from producing healthy babies and from nursing them: “crowded rooms, late hours, luxurious tables, and slothful inactivity, must contribute to the production of a puny offspring . . . [and] deprive the greater part of females in high life, of the capacity of discharging the first maternal office” (Wakefield 15-16). Furthermore, a mother would “waste her days in the frivolous employment of needle-work, or the executive minutiae of domestic affairs” instead of “taking an active part in forming the minds of her children” (Wakefield 39-40). One literary critic, Paula Cohen, even insinuates that the model of female behavior in eighteenth-century novels led to suicidal self-starvation: “Clarissa, ‘an exemplar for her sex’ as Richardson calls her, anticipates the anorectic girl . . . of the past twenty years” (2). More dangerously, this system, an “education of the body,” rendered women vulnerable to seduction and prostitution. As Wollstonecraft explains, “Necessity never makes prostitution the business of men’s lives; though numberless are the women who are thus rendered systematically vicious. This, however, arises in a great degree from the state of idleness in which women are educated, who are always taught to look up to man for a maintenance, and to consider their persons as the proper return for his exertions to support them” (*Vindication* 165). There was a dark side to what Burney’s Elinor Joddrel terms, “angelical perfection” (*The Wanderer* 399).

The moral pamphlet, *The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution*,⁴ which is also the subject of the next section, represents traditionalists’ views of “female education.” Whether this pamphlet was widely read is unknown, though Wollstonecraft certainly read it

⁴ The full title of this anonymously written pamphlet is: *The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution; with an Inquiry into the Causes of their Present Alarming Increase, and Some Means Recommended for Checking Their Progress* (London: T. Vernor, 1792). To avoid the repetition of the phrase, “the writer,” I sometimes use the pronoun, “he,” which is based upon my own assumptions and is not an historical designation. However, there is some evidence that the writer is male and Wollstonecraft refers to the writer as such in her review. Hereafter I will refer to it as *The Evils*.

and her review in Analytical Review would have given it some notice. This text can be seen as a precursor to Victorian treatments of prostitution because it elicits sympathy for the prostitute and focuses on socially determined causes. Yet, the writer demands regulation of female sexuality much as many middle-class reformers do. His proposal for a reform of female education aligns his text with feminist thought on women's roles and attitudes toward public and domestic women.

Echoing Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau, the writer believes:

Women, in the present system of education, are treated as the play things and amusements of the other sex, as without usefulness and without a character. Music, dancing, drawing, &c. all elegant accomplishments, are the parts of education to which the greatest attention is paid; all well enough for amusement, but of little service to her when called upon to direct a house and to preside in a family. From their very infancy, they are initiated in gambling, and long before their education is completed, they are accustomed to frequent routs, balls, assemblies, card parties, and every place of pleasure and entertainment. Then the intervals of this business are filled up with dress and the reading of novels. Every thing is contrived, as if on purpose, to foment every evil passion, and to encourage dissipation and debauchery. All is gay and entertaining; nothing useful and serious. How unfit are such women to direct a family, or to bring up children? How ill qualified either for wives or for mothers? . . . The whole system seems contrived to bring them up for courtezans [sic] and strumpets. . . . (71; 73-74)

As the writer points out the irony of this female education that threatens its closest followers with prostitution, he blurs the boundary between the prostitute and the ideal woman: "The unhappy females devoted to [prostitution] are, in general, the finest of

women. It is their youth, beauty, and innocence, that render them the objects of temptation. Their very excellencies become their misfortunes, when they fall into the power of unprincipled and brutal men.” Here, the ideal woman becomes the fallen woman almost through no fault of her own—her fall implies a lack of agency.⁵ The ideals embodied in this construction of Woman, youth, beauty, and innocence, sadly, do not safeguard her from the very forces that demand them: “Those qualities, which should command reverence and respect, only excite furious lust . . .” (12).

The writer blames the behavior of fashionable society for rampant promiscuity. Profligate men of rank and fortune are on the top of the writer's list in his discussion of the causes of adultery and prostitution. The writer also blames the degenerate customs of the court that have historically allowed “adultery and profligacy. . . kept in countenance” (45). Considering the great influence, wealth, and power of the superior classes, the writer believes most people would expect them to be leaders in national morals. Yet, men of all classes end up adopting their immoral behavior. Similarly, “the luxury and opulence of the nation,” second on the list, is blamed for inflaming passions and encouraging idleness (46). Moreover, pleasure-seeking activities dominate the lives of the country's elite women who neglect their children and homes. By attending “the playhouse, the masquerade, balls, routs, and assemblies, and other places of pleasure and entertainment,” these women become dissipated and idle and are exposed to seduction, vice, and lewdness (47). Paradoxically, the “superior” classes were not morally superior; that quality was reserved for the middle classes. Like the feminists, this writer also critiques the present system of female education for its damaging results: “Late hours and dissipation, the mind continually on the rack, in its search of pleasure, will soon affect the health, and bring on those

⁵ For a thorough discussion of the issues of agency and selfhood in the “rhetoric of fallenness,” see Amanda Anderson's Tainted Souls and Painted Faces. Anderson analyzes the discourses of reform in the Victorian period.

diseases, which, if they do not terminate life immediately, will deprive it of all enjoyments” (74).

Both traditionalists and feminists warn middle-class women against following the idle lifestyle of fashionable, upper-class women by showing how such an education threatened women with ill-health, death, unhealthy babies, seduction and prostitution. Both also responded to this ineffectual female education of the upper classes that promoted promiscuity, idleness, dissipation, and social activity. On one hand, the traditionalists promoted their version of womanhood, domestic woman, which predominated in English culture by the early 1800s, and which is the subject of the following section. On the other hand, the feminists advocated a very different kind of domestic woman.

Domestic Woman: Regulating Female Space

Didactic prose valorized the domestic sphere in women's lives and encoded the responsibilities and duties of mothers and wives. Poovey claims that “by the end of the eighteenth century . . . the qualities that a century earlier had been described as necessary defenses against women's appetites were increasingly considered to be 'natural' female traits . . .” (*Proper* 14). Because female sexuality was constructed as voracious and threatening earlier in the century, attempts to control it resulted in the idealization of a feminine nature whose sexuality was suppressed. Poovey asserts that “all definitions of female virtue allude to--and try to control--sexuality. . . . at the heart of the explicit description of 'feminine,' Angelic women, superior to all physical appetite, resides the 'female' sexuality that was automatically assumed to be the defining characteristic of female nature” (*Proper* 19). Barker-Benfield identifies the aims of conduct books as this control of appetite which included “restrained movement, . . . not naming the body's functions (sweating) or even parts (stomach and teeth),” and the demand for female cleanliness . . . women were required to internalize male wishes” (289-90; 294). Thus, the type of woman

who emerged from conduct literature had no appetites, “no vanity, no passion, no assertive ‘self’ at all” (Poovey, Proper 21). Instead, she had a moral superiority from which she retained the power of influence: her domain was the household and family unit.

The anonymous The Female Aegis: Or, The Duties of Women From Childhood to Old Age (1798) is representative of “didactic prose.”⁶ Many of the concepts, subjects and themes found in this text are also found in other female advice books aimed at the middle class. For instance, gender distinctions prevail, and as in most didactic prose, are sanctioned by nature or Divine Will:

the Giver of all good, in the dispensation of other qualities, more particularly suited to the sphere in which women were intended to move, hath conferred the larger portion of his bounty on those who needed it most. It is accordingly manifest, that in sprightliness and vivacity, in quickness of perception, in fertility of invention, in powers . . . diffuse throughout the family circle the enlivening and endearing smile of cheerfulness, the superiority of the female mind is unrivalled. (9)

Women provide examples “of modesty, of delicacy, of sympathising sensibility, of prompt and active benevolence, of warmth and tenderness of attachment” as part of human nature (9). The theme of women's moral superiority dominates this book: “in three particulars, each of which is of extreme and never-ceasing concern to the welfare of mankind, the effect produced by the influence of the female character is most important” (3). The three “particulars” are primarily domestic: we see women's influence on her extended family, on men, and on children.

Despite his/her moral tone and religiosity, the writer advocates a substantial and useful female education and dismisses “ornamental acquisitions” or accomplishments as

⁶ Though this book is a plagiarized version of Thomas Gisborne's Inquiry, it is referenced more often than the original, according to Gina Luria, the editor of this Garland edition.

inviting too much competition, pride, and vanity. The latter qualities are temptations that exist in nearly every aspect of female behavior. Thus, attending public places and boarding schools, placing too much attention on female dress, participating in social amusements and being involved in any aspect of London society are deemed extravagant and corrupting. In typical middle-class fashion, the pious writer preaches moderation and an avoidance of the “customary diversions.” One is left to think that every aspect of the civilized world is designed to ruin women. To counter this dismal view of life, the writer offers only the regular habit of reading “history, biography, poetry, or some of the various branches of elegant and profitable knowledge,” and “the discharge of relative duties, and the exercise of benevolence” like nursing the sick and instructing children. The writer wriggles out of this paltry list by declaring that “there will yet be hours remaining unoccupied; hours for which no specific employment has been provided. For such hours it is not the intention of these pages to prescribe any specific employment” (75, 79-80). The advice is devoted more to what is not permissible than to what is. Thus, The Female Aegis contributes to the process of prescribing acceptable female behavior that was occurring throughout the late-eighteenth century.

The primary result of this domestic ideology was that as female space was narrowed, women’s sexual behavior was more controlled. In Reflections (1798), Priscilla Wakefield’s model of domestic woman depends upon a wife’s and mother’s active participation in the home. In fact, raising children and supervising their education is more important than housekeeping and traditional female employments like needlework. But, Wakefield insists on confining women to the home primarily in order to regulate female sexuality: “A woman earnestly occupied in this most interesting of all engagements, has no leisure to court the stupid gaze of casual admiration . . . her treasure is at home.” The “unhappy deviations from conjugal fidelity” could be avoided, she argues, if “the wretched delinquents fulfilled the tender duties of the maternal character” (44). This image of the

devoted mother and domestic caretaker, she believes, is powerful enough to ward off even the “boldest seducer.” He would realize that “there was no chance of success with one, whose mind was so virtuously pre-occupied” (45-46).

This restriction of women to domestic space which banished female desire helped to associate such women with chastity and fidelity and public women with deviance and sexuality. While women gained moral superiority and “power” from their expertise in the domestic world, they were increasingly restricted to such space. For example, in a section entitled “the Duties of Matrimonial Life” in The Female Aegis, the writer discourages wives from displaying their knowledge to their husbands or in social situations because such women are not only “deemed one of the least eligible of wives,” but are believed to neglect their domestic duties (101, 103). Similarly, travelling is not approved of because it interrupts domestic life. Women can lose their positive influence in the home and, hence, their moral superiority: “Home is the centre round which the influence of every married woman is principally accumulated . . . (114).

Wakefield extends this influence of the middle classes’ domestic women to the lower classes. Such is the power of the home, and the woman who maintains it, she writes, that its comforts alone can sway husbands from neglect, abuse, and abandonment. Moreover, she offers a distinctly middle-class version of domesticity that preserves female modesty and chastity to counter the sexual license so commonly associated with the poor. She insists on a separation of the sexes in the fields, the manufactories, school, and the home in order to avoid sexual promiscuity. The home, she proposes, should be a more commonly used workplace since women can provide closer supervision of their family. She celebrates the sober influence of the middle class on the laboring poor and the need for the latter to conform to their ideal image of domesticity: “whatever, therefore, conduces to reform their morals, will increase their comforts, and improve their condition . . . the influence of this motive to do well [is] so efficacious upon the middle classes of mankind”

(180-181). Both The Female Aegis and Wakefield's Reflections illustrate that the domestic woman, attentive to the needs of her children and husband, and to the demands of running a household, became the defining ideal for women of all classes in late-eighteenth English society. However, by confining women to the private sphere, domesticity restricted womanhood and controlled her sexuality. Moreover, it made it more difficult for women to enter the public sphere, especially when the public woman became increasingly associated with fallen and defeminized women. Women's fiction of this period, including our novels, represents public space as a masculine world where respectable women were threatened with seduction, sexual assault, and abandonment (Barker-Benfield 237-40). And, because women of the middle and upper classes could not enter this world alone, they relied upon a hired companion to accompany them when they did go out (Rizzo 28). Betty Rizzo claims that "When women in novels of the period do go out alone, it is often a mark of purpose so strong that it overrides convention, a moment of strong moral conviction in the heroine, in which she knows she must act" (28). At the same time that women viewed this masculine world as dangerous, they hoped to reform it and make it safe for women (Barker-Benfield 237-40). In the meantime, the public and domestic worlds were at odds with each other.

Domestic Woman/Public Woman: Regulating Female Sexuality

The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution promotes the image of domestic woman and emphasizes the distance between her and the prostitute. The writer projects a universalized ideal of womanhood limiting women to their biological destiny to support an argument against prostitution since it discourages both marriage and childbearing. A wife's sexual behavior was determined by procreation and she was expected to be chaste. My thesis is that the purpose of The Evils, apart from detailing the causes and effects of prostitution, is to restrict female sexuality to conjugal love, making all other forms of sexuality illegal.

In order to regulate female desire, the writer widens the gap between domestic and public women. Hence, the writer is dependent on the construction of an ideal/fallen antithesis to establish difference. The manners of women are judged according to the degrees to which they typify femininity and masculinity. The ideal woman embodies and practices “such things as are feminine; modesty, innocence, the timid blush, the faltering voice, and that reluctance with which she surrenders all her charms . . .” (34). In contrast, the prostitute becomes associated with “masculine manners, with impudence, with indecent gestures, with bold and lascivious discourse, and with that forward importunity, with which she solicits sensual gratifications” (34). Because the manners of the prostitute violate the established codes of femininity, they are just as, if not more, offensive as the practice of prostitution:

for who can contemplate without horror that dreadful change that passes on their manners and that universal corruption of the moral principles. . .

Modesty and bashful innocence are exchanged for impudence and forward importunity. . . In these detestable habits, the softness, the delicacy, and innocence of the female character are totally sunk. (13)

By defeminizing prostitutes the writer situates them as the “other” to “ideal” womanhood.

One of the essential differences between domestic and public women is the extent to which the former fulfills her biologically-determined role as mother and the latter fails:

“Thus the finest of women are for ever cut off from all usefulness; and though destined for the ornament and blessing of the world, become its nuisances and disgrace. The lovely female, formed by nature to be the happy mother of a numerous offspring, is condemned by prostitution to be a fruitless and rotten member, the outcast of society, and the bane and ruin of families.” (13). In no uncertain terms, the writer valorizes the “usefulness” of women’s fulfilling their predetermined role and dismisses the uselessness of the prostitute’s body. Of course, it is only by privileging marriage and propagation that the

prostitute's body is rendered useless for she served a particular social role, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Thus, central to the differences between private and public women is female sexuality and autonomy. The categories of ideal and fallen are further dichotomized into love and lust, respectively. Whereas chastity, modesty, and self-regulation are “ideal,” sexual desire, aggressiveness, and a lack of self-control are “fallen.” Indeed, with such limitations, it is not surprising that any expression of female sexuality, whether by radical women writers or their fictional heroines, was likened to prostitution. The writer of The Evils views any expression or practice of sexuality as deviant and immoral that is not within the legal and socially-approved sexuality of marriage.

Although he places very little blame on the woman herself and virtually all the blame on the upper classes, fashionable social customs, and newspapers, novels and romances, he expects women to regulate their sexuality. In order to demonstrate this and the “evils of adultery and prostitution” he exaggerates the progress of an “innocent and helpless woman” (21) who is seduced then abandoned, reminiscent of Hogarth’s The Harlot’s Progress (1732). He distorts his picture further by closing off the possibility of redemption and we may begin to wonder how much of his inquiry is historical truth or imaginative fiction. The focus on seduction, believed to be the major cause of prostitution, has much in common with mid-eighteenth century accounts of fallen women which acted as warnings, attempts to gain sympathy for the prostitute, and ideological truth (Nash 458). In other ways, it also drew attention to the sexual double standard and a female's lack of agency that fits in with virtuous behavior. The fatalistic future of the ruined woman also drew attention to the lack of opportunities in the work world. For the most part, though, like much of the eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, this text serves as a warning. And, the true purpose of the text is revealed in the “lessons” he wishes to draw for every female. Women are advised to monitor themselves in their moral behavior: “Narrow is the

boundary between vice and virtue, and a moment may decide her fate and character for ever [sic]" (23–24). This harsh indictment greatly contrasts actual experiences in which fallen women were reconciled to their families and friends, or set out to work, as the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes accounts show. The author warns women against men of rank or fortune and demands they regulate their time spent with them. And, of course, they must govern their sexuality by preserving their chastity. The writer succeeds in limiting expressions of female sexuality by putting responsibility for proper and lawful sexual behavior in the hands of women.

Public Woman: The Woman Writer

Because women were held responsible for regulating their sexual activities, they could be blamed for their transgressions. Women were discouraged from entering the public sphere, but if they did, they were expected to retain their domestic qualities. Richard Polwhele's satiric poem, "The Unsex'd Females," attacks women writers like Mary Wollstonecraft for transgressing femininity. Just as The Evils found that illicit sexual activity distinguished domestic woman from fallen or public woman, Polwhele focuses on women writers' masculine sexual appetite. Polwhele discredits those who support feminism by linking their feminist philosophy with their "fallen" identity.

One of the greatest contrasts between the image of the domestic woman and the fallen woman was seen in the woman writer who earns a living. Radical women entered the traditionally didactic field of novel writing that expressed the moral superiority of women. Thus, they retained an authority that allowed them to articulate proposals for reform. Unlike some of their contemporaries, they dared to enter traditionally male domains of politics, philosophy, theology and science. As they publicly voiced their opinions, ideas, and proposals for social or political change, they crossed over the ideological boundaries of the "Proper Lady." There was a price to pay for such "unsex'd"

behavior: "towards the end of the century 'feminism' was associated with being anti-English and with sexual licentiousness" (Ty 19).

Polwhele believes these women writers offend "Nature's law" not only by writing, but by their forthright sexuality and lack of modesty. Female sexuality is equated with offending Nature, or women's culturally accepted roles: "Nature is the grand basis of all laws human and divine: and the woman, who has no regard to nature, either in the decoration of her person, or the culture of her mind, will soon 'walk after the flesh; in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government'" (6).⁷ To prove such a bizarre assertion, Polwhele looks at the influence of the French on women's dress and quotes Robison's Proofs of a Conspiracy: "[women] have now their source among prostitutes--among women of the most abandoned character . . . 'women [are seen in theatres] laying aside all modesty, and presenting themselves to the public view, with bared limbs, a la sauvage, as the alluring objects of desire' (8). The effect of feminist philosophy would be this titillating exposure of the female body--the ultimate image of modesty abandoned. In contrast to the codes of female modesty that hide the female body, the "unnatural" woman exposes her body and indulges her female sexuality.

The modesty, beauty and taste of the domestic woman is constructed as "natural" in contrast to the unnaturalness of feminism. For Polwhele, Wollstonecraft exemplifies the figure of the unnatural woman: "See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,/Arise, the intrepid champion of her sex;/ O'er humbled man assert the sovereign claim" (13).

Polwhele has Wollstonecraft dictate that women should abandon their "natural" female delicacy:

'Ere long, each little artifice discard,
No more by weakness winning fond regard;

⁷ Polwhele does not cite his source here, but it is probably from The Pursuits of Literature, the text which inspired him to write his poem. I have not been able to find Robison's Proofs of a Conspiracy.

Nor eyes, that sparkle from their blushes, roll,
 Nor catch the languors of the sick'ning soul,
 Nor the quick flutter, nor the coy reserve,
 But nobly boast the firm gymnastic nerve;
 Nor more affect with Delicacy's fan
 To hide the emotion from congenial man
 To the bold heights where glory beams, aspire. . .
 And vindicate *the Rights of womankind.*' (14-15)

He dismisses any woman writer who supports Wollstonecraft's ideas or appears to be a "Wollstonecraftian" such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley, Mary Hays, Angelica Kauffman, and Emma Crewe.⁸ In his vicious attack on their "chief," Wollstonecraft, he focuses largely on her illicit sexual activity, or what he calls "licentious love" (26). Much in the same vein as Polwhele, the Anti-Jacobin Review of 1798 undermines Mary Wollstonecraft's reputation by listing her in the index under the word "prostitution" (Ty 19). Godwin's Memoirs provides Polwhele with examples of Wollstonecraft's sexual behavior: he refers to her affairs with the artist Henry Fuseli, the American entrepreneur Gilbert Imlay, and William Godwin. Polwhele dominates his poetic text with a retelling of Godwin's memoirs in his series of footnotes. To counter this army of radical women, Polwhele gathers together talented writers and artists whom he believes exemplify women's "nature" with their modesty, chastity and unquestionable moral conduct: Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, Anna Seward, Hester Piozzi, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Lady Diana Beauclerk and

⁸ While some of these women clearly support Wollstonecraft, Polwhele ties the illustrators Kauffman and Crewe to the group solely for particular prints of theirs. Crewe "overstepped the modesty of nature, by giving the portrait ['Flora at Play with Cupid'] an air of voluptuousness too luxuriously melting" (Polwhele 21).

their leader, Hannah More, who is “diametrically opposed to Mary Wollstonecraft” (35).⁹

Polwhele’s distinctions, though inaccurate and simplified, reveal the extent to which certain feminine qualities expected of women were attributed to nature. His text also informs us of the extent to which female sexuality was equated with deviation from the naturalized norm. Clearly, what emerges is a fear of women’s sexuality that disturbs natural and national orders: conservatives like Edmund Burke expressed both their fear of the influence of France’s revolution on the English working classes and their fear of women demanding political and economic rights.

The Prostitute

As we have seen, the increasingly hegemonic domestic ideology of the middle class sought to restrict female sexuality to the bounds of marriage, to circumscribe female space, and to maintain moral order. The more the middle class was determined to define strict boundaries between respectable and fallen women, the more unstable these boundaries became, a process that our heroines illuminate. Our heroines redraw these boundaries by redefining proper feminine behavior to incorporate greater freedom and independence to speak, think and act on their own, and to have sexual desire. Though they are not actual prostitutes, they are viewed and treated as such by a society governed by laws regulating female sexuality and ideology proscribing female behavior. In this section I examine the ambiguity of the prostitute’s definition, demonstrating that the broadening of it which we see in the laws of the period also reflected the attempts to control female sexuality and female space. Significantly, these laws, devised to regulate prostitution and female sexuality, were also designed in response to demands for the social control of the working

⁹ Polwhele curiously includes the scandalously married Piozzi and the scandalously divorced Beauclerk with this group for their artistic works. Polwhele remains inconsistent in his criteria for dividing women into the two camps led by More and Wollstonecraft.

classes by the middle classes. Our heroines can look to the prostitute who was usually a member of the working classes as a targeted victim of women's oppression. I restrict my sources to those covering the late-eighteenth century in order to illustrate the social climate during the times our novelists were writing and to which they were responding, demonstrating the magnitude of our heroines' resistance to the social, legal, and moral restrictions on female behavior.

Defining the Prostitute

Defining prostitution is a complex task. Women turned to prostitution for many reasons, but primarily as a result of economic necessity, not their innate depravity, as many supposed. Others were tricked into it. Trumbach documents many criminal cases, like that of young Mary MacDonald who was lured by the promise of money to have sex with a gentleman. There are also cases like that of twelve-year old Ann Sissons who met a young man in the street who asks her to his house to which she goes willingly a few days later with a friend. Apparently she enjoyed his company because she goes to the magistrate only under direct order of her parents. Ultimately the case is dismissed. Other young girls were not so willing: they were abducted, tortured, and raped, and kept as prostitutes in a house or eventually ended up as streetwalkers. In many of these cases these young women were unwilling to work as prostitutes, but were constrained by a variety of forces such as the psychological power of an older woman in charge, the lack of alternatives, the economic gain, or the fear of the legal action for debt, to keep to the life (Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution).

As early as the fifteenth century "a prostitute was defined as a woman who lives by her body" (Karras 426).¹⁰ In the eighteenth century a woman suspected of prostitution

¹⁰ Karras's definition comes directly from the legal language of medieval town ordinances.

was not arrested for receiving money for sexual services but “if she is riotous, drunk or disturbing the neighborhood”¹¹ or guilty of what the law defined as “disorderly conduct,” which was open to interpretation, but which was “the usual legal basis for apprehending a prostitute throughout most of this period” (Nash, Social Attitudes 20-21). In general, until the mid-nineteenth century, the law was remarkably murky and open to interpretation. For example, at this time, it was not clear whether a prostitute could be arrested under the Vagrant Act of 1744 (Nash, Social Attitudes 25-6).

One of the reasons the category, prostitute, was difficult to explain precisely was because of its legal definition. As early as 1744, when the first Vagrancy Act was made effective, unaccompanied women walking the streets at night were automatically suspicious. Yet, Nash asserts, as some contemporaries realized, this act was not aimed at prostitutes. It is not until the Vagrancy Act of 1822 that “a common prostitute wandering in the public streets and not giving a satisfactory account of herself could be declared and [sic] idle and disorderly person” (Nash, Social Attitudes 25). The Laws Respecting Women reports in 1777 that “women wandering and begging in parishes and places to which they do not belong” could be detained and committed to the house of correction or publicly whipped (Laws 104). The fear tactics that turned the streets into a danger zone resulted in circumscribing women's space, keeping them in their “proper” social and economic place.

The category, prostitute, reveals much about contemporary attitudes towards female sexuality, especially because estimates of the extent to which prostitution existed were often based merely on observation and speculation since few documents of evidence were available. For example, in A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis (1797), Patrick Colquhoun estimates a total of 50,000 prostitutes in a city with a population of about a

¹¹ According to Patrick Colquhoun's testimony in Committee on the Police (1816).

million.¹² E. P. Thompson puts such figures into perspective by exposing Colquhoun's inclusion of 'lewd and immoral women' and lower class women 'who cohabit together without marriage' as prostitutes (56).¹³ Priscilla Wakefield believed there were 5,000 prostitutes in London in the 1790s (Reflections 421). Though Nash finds that many of the figures reported by officials and institutions like the London Female Penitentiary were, in fact, overestimates, he does not propose any conclusive figure. Trumbach investigates these figures conclusively and finds Saunder Welch's estimate of 3,000 prostitutes in London the most accurate.¹⁴ These exaggerated numbers and the popular perception that prostitution was increasing indicate clearly the concern for social disorder, especially in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Nash, Social Attitudes 406). For example, in 1792 the author of The Evils senses that "Within the last twenty years, the advances of prostitution have been very alarming," yet he or she presents little evidence except his or her own observations of the increased visibility of prostitutes in public (5). In addition, the author is worried about prostitution's contribution to the general decay of morals in society, the reduction of the population, and the rejection of marriage. What this alarmist attitude usually means, as historians are quick to point out, is that there is probably an increase of concern among the middle and upper classes rather than an actual increase in prostitution at

¹²Many contemporaries accepted this outrageous number, including Mayhew in the late-nineteenth century. Nash provides a cultural context to explain how such numbers emerged and why they were not questioned (see pp. 402-4). Some scholars today, like David Simpson, mistakenly continue to rely on this statistic.

¹³Nash makes a similar observation and also notes that part-time prostitutes and kept mistresses were often included in the "nebulous" category of prostitute (Social Attitudes 407).

¹⁴Sex and the Gender Revolution, Ch. 5. Trumbach bases his conclusions on arrest lists of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, Session Rolls of Middlesex and Westminster, for the early part of the century, and arrest records of London.

this time.¹⁵

In the definitions of prostitution and the laws behind them, we see a determined effort to regulate working-class moral and cultural behavior. For example, working-class women engaged in “free or consensual unions” were considered prostitutes (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 465). These unions were either stable and permanent or brief as a result of desertion. Because each type produced illegitimate children, these unions attracted the notice of the middle-class reformist. In some cases, a couple simply had to wait and save up before marrying and would therefore develop a common-law arrangement. In other cases, the woman was abandoned by a mobile worker, or exchanged sexual favors for gifts, cash or work (Tilly, Scott, Cohen 464–5). In all cases, the threat to her economic security was clearly involved.

Such unions were formed within the context of what feminist historians, Louise A. Tilly, Joan W. Scott and Miriam Cohen, identify as the “wish to marry.” Women engaged in premarital sex because they were promised marriage (465). In contrast, Edward Shorter believes these unions reflected a woman's desire for independence, or “the wish to be free.” In their study, the authors counter Shorter's argument that the dramatic increase in illegitimate births in the late-eighteenth century can be explained by a “sexual revolution” that took place once women began working and sought self-fulfillment. The feminist historians examine the historical reality of working-class culture and demonstrate that women worked because of necessity and familial obligation and did not find it emancipatory. They explain the increase in sexual activity as a consequence of the illicit arrangements women entered while they were working away from home. These women usually believed in legal marriage and monogamy.

Thus, middle-class moral reformers, among others, awkwardly fit women in such

¹⁵Laqueur and Nash, among others, make this point. Historically, we may attribute any increase in prostitution to economic factors; yet, the author of *The Evils* describes a climate of national prosperity.

a variety of circumstances into the category of prostitute by viewing different kinds of behavior or cultural customs, usually of the working class, as prostitution. Their broad assumptions are not just inaccurate and inadequate, but ideological. My thesis is that they narrowed the definition of appropriate sexual behavior in an attempt to control female sexuality and to impose their morals on the working classes.

The broadening of the definition of prostitution beyond its occupational one reflected attempts to preserve ideals about marriage and chastity. By the late-nineteenth century, the investigative journalist, Henry Mayhew, in his study of the London poor, defines prostitution most broadly as “putting of anything to a vile use”—a meaning that survives today and a definition he derives from the phrase, “putting a woman's charms to vile uses” (4:35). The moral reformists, the middle class, and even policymakers attempted to distance themselves from sexually active lower-class women and from what they saw as uncontained female sexuality and a disruptive class by their use of this category, “prostitute,” and viewing her as “other.”¹⁶ These fears arose, as both Thompson and Nash remind us, in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Laws Regulating Prostitution

The laws regulating prostitution support this distance between domestic and public women and between classes. For example, underlying the laws against lewd behavior is a concern for moral order. The author of The Laws Respecting Women (1777) reports that:

Lewdness of all kinds, or an illicit commerce between the sexes, is properly cognizable and punishable by the ecclesiastical law courts. But when such practices affect the good order and decorum of society, they become crimes

¹⁶Janet Todd makes some similar observations in her discussion of prostitution in The Sign of Angellica, pp. 116 and 204. She argues that the genteel lady could attempt to reform her 'fallen' sister only by distancing herself from her. Obviously class distinctions widen this gap.

properly cognizable by the civil magistrate The keeping a bawdy-house is considered as a common nuisance; by drawing together dissolute and debauched persons of both sexes, to this great corruption of their manners, and disturbance of the public peace (299)

In this excerpt, the intervention of the law occurs only at the point where the private and public intersect, representing, in fact, the inadequacy of these spatial conceptions. Indeed, it becomes clear that there is no real boundary between the two. The law insures “good order and decorum,” or, in other words, good manners, and reflexively responds to any threat to these culturally and class determined practices, and seems mostly concerned with protecting the elite from the working class. The bawdy-house is a particular focus of the law for its disruption of “public peace.” Consequently, the law is invoked for the intention of containment. The writer employs images that reflect a particularly middle-class fear of mixture with corruption by or contamination from sexually-active people. Bernard Mandeville supports such a view in “A Modest Defence of Publick Stews” (1724) with his claim that “prostitution was necessary. . . because it protected the virtue of respectable women from seduction” (Nash, Social Attitudes 178).

Though identified in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the volatile rise of the middle-class, this attitude toward prostitution-as-disease was established much earlier. In some parts of medieval England, prostitutes were forbidden from speaking to or attending church with respectable women (Karras 420–21). And, in many of the mid-century proposals for institutions for prostitutes, it is suggested that prostitutes be kept separate from the public. Moreover, common to all such proposals is that these institutions be separate from the City. Though this separation was put forth as a measure of protection for the penitent prostitute, it is a thinly-veiled attempt at maintaining class difference. The Magdalen Hospital and other institutions did separate the women according to class and education and turned away hardened prostitutes to avoid corruption.

We see this attitude toward contamination of female sexuality still prevailing in late-eighteenth century fiction when Adeline Mowbray's fallen status prevents her from meeting Mr. Maynard's sisters and even Frederic Glenmurray's cousins in Amelia Opie's novel.

The control of female sexuality and female space had been the goal of lawmakers since the fifteenth century. For example, by regulating brothels in places where they were legal, local authorities felt able to contain public order, according to Ruth Karras.¹⁷ At the same time, they not only attempted to protect women from abuse or economic exploitation, they guaranteed the availability of women for this purpose. Karras claims that "the most central concern . . . in shaping the regulations and prohibitions directed at prostitutes, brothels, and brothel keepers was the preservation of public order, which required control over female sexuality" (422). Moreover, Karras discovers that "the simple presence of independent women might also violate order . . . Any woman making public scenes or quarrels, or misbehaving sexually, was a threat to order." She concludes that "the regulations thus attempted not to stamp out prostitution as immoral but rather to control it as disorderly" (423).

As a result, Karras finds, prostitution was often limited to certain streets or one brothel. Similarly, in the eighteenth century when authorities felt unable to control prostitution they limited it to designated areas. In 1778, an ordinance was passed in France, for example, that seemed both to prohibit and tolerate prostitution. According to Hilary Evans, prostitutes "'were forbidden to walk in public places or display themselves in windows . . . and, if they insisted on doing these forbidden things, they must do them only in certain parts of the city'" (Roberts 181). Some prostitutes in towns which did not

¹⁷The primary focus of Karras's study, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England," is the London suburb of Southwark which "is one of two jurisdictions in England where there were legal, officially sponsored brothels and the only one about which much information survives" (410).

legally sanction brothels were forced to separate themselves from bourgeois wives by wearing distinguishing clothing. The prostitute was kept physically and legally separate from other women: "To work in a public brothel she must not be attached to any one man. Similarly, wives or nuns who belonged to a man or to God were not to be received in the stewhouses" (Karras 422). Furthermore, the seventeenth-century legal term, "spinster," which referred to an unmarried woman, was a term used in a 1543 Southwark ordinance to designate not just single women, but prostitutes. The sexuality of an independent woman, because she did not belong under the jurisdiction of any man, was the object of the regulations, which provide us with significant cultural contexts of her legal position.

Clearly, female sexuality that was not already under patriarchal control in a relationship or marriage was supposed to be regulated by local civil authorities. Like women in medieval Southwark, the woman of the late-eighteenth century had only two acceptable choices: she was either the property of an individual man or the property of the community. Outside of these legally and socially condoned customs was the single woman who freely chose her lover much like the heroines of the novels of my study. With free choice she did not fall under either of these regulations and thus, was presented as a moral and social threat. What authorities usually did not tolerate, as Karras's study indicates, is the sexually-liberated independent woman who was not a prostitute. Prostitution was tolerated because a woman's body helped contain male sexuality and, therefore, served social needs.¹⁸ For that reason, efforts to eradicate prostitution usually failed.

Many of those in the eighteenth century greatly concerned with prostitution, or involved with the proposals for the Magdalen House and similar charities, believed that the vice, crime, and immorality plaguing England threatened its political security and social

¹⁸ Trumbach makes a similar argument in his chapter on libertines in Sex and the Gender Revolution. In addition, he argues that the new prohibition on sodomy between men made libertines seek prostitutes to substantiate their masculinity and the naturalness of the sex act.

order. Thus, “the attack on prostitution as one of the vices against which they fought, was part of a growing response to the social turbulence of the times” (Nash, Social Attitudes 94). Prostitutes were associated with pickpockets, robbers, and the general criminal underworld (Nash, Social Attitudes 121-22). Because “the lower end of the sex market was so flooded with poor women that it was often impossible to make an adequate living,” Roberts explains, “the women took to petty crime” (169). Patrick Colquhoun, among many contemporaries, associated prostitution with thievery, as did those who presented testimonies to parliamentary committees and committees on the police. Moreover, the 1752 Statute on Brothels and Disorderly Houses explicitly makes the connection: “And whereas the Multitude of Places of Entertainment for the lower Sort of People is another Cause of Thefts and Robberies, as they are thereby tempted to spend their small Substance in . . . Pleasures, and in Consequence are put on unlawful Methods of supplying their Wants, and renewing their Pleasures . . .”¹⁹ Disorderly houses were targeted heavily in the 1752 Act because they were seen to play a significant role in social disturbances. Nash notes that “Immorality, particularly, in time of war, was thought to be a threat to political security well before 1789 . . .” but during the French Revolution and its aftermath sensitivity to this threat grew and immorality was the focus (Social Attitudes 135).

Nash's central thesis is that the heightened concern over immorality and crime, especially prostitution, was a clear attempt to institute the social control of the English working classes. I believe that the efforts to control prostitution were organized to maintain not only the subordination of the working classes, but of women and their sexuality, issues that are not addressed by Nash. Because the laws regarding prostitution clearly assume that sexually-active women threatened the social order, I believe they affected more than just the prostitute. The moral reformers' focus on prostitution and its laws shows that

¹⁹ The full text of this Act appears in Appendix I of Nash's dissertation, Social Attitudes.

conflicts deepened between the working class who are associated with the prostitute and the middle class who demanded social order. In the next section I demonstrate the extent to which our heroines are aligned with the prostitute because of their rejection of “ideal” feminine behavior. Neither wholly “ideal,” nor “fallen” women, our heroines t illustrate the instability of the boundaries between the two that both the middle class’s domestic ideology and the laws regulating prostitution attempted to draw.

The Fallen: Transgressing the Ideal

We have seen in the previous sections of this chapter that there are blatant contradictions between, as Mary Hays puts it, “what men would have women to be . . . what women are . . . [and] what women ought to be” (An Appeal). In this section, I interrogate the extent to which our heroines conformed to or resisted the “ideal” or “fallen” versions of womanhood. Our heroines insist on fulfilling their own desires and are not rewarded for following textbook models of propriety and virtue. My thesis is that they transgress gender boundaries through their sexuality, the subject of this chapter, and their desire for independence and work, which is the subject of the next chapter. Though our heroines are not actual prostitutes who live by their body, they are sexualized women who fall under the same regulations. As the case of Opie’s Adeline Mowbray and Mary Warner show, our heroines interrogate the very categories of fallen woman and prostitute.

As Janet Todd points out, these novelists were influenced by Rousseau’s Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse (1761) which suggested for the first time that a woman who had a sexual experience could be redeemed (Sign 230). Julie’s illicit sexual experience is an act of resistance to the very ideals in which she has been educated as an upper-class woman. It is significant that the name of Rousseau’s heroine, Julie, is used in different forms in Burney’s and Williams’ novels and that allusions to this novel appears in almost all of these novels. Opie’s Adeline is forbidden to read the book, though in an authorial intrusion we

are assured it would have taught her the value of marriage (I: 157). Similarly, the “dangerous, enchanting work” is taken away from Hays’s Emma Courtney by her father, but not before it has influenced her; Augustus Harley becomes her Saint-Preux (I: 41). Wollstonecraft’s Maria Venables also reads it (88). By creating heroines who transgress gender boundaries, our authors attempted to rewrite Rousseau’s best-selling romance.

Amelia Opie’s portrayal of Adeline Mowbray best demonstrates the contradictory nature of female identity and the extent to which independent female sexuality disrupts the category of the domestic woman. At the same time that Adeline learns traditional feminine skills, she is under the tutelage of her “genius” mother who teaches her to engage in the masculine domain of political discourse: “though wisely resolved to fulfil, as usual, every feminine duty, Adeline was convinced that she, like her mother, had a right to be an author, a politician, and a philosopher . . . Though possessed of taste and talents for literature, she was skilled in the minutest details of housewifery and feminine occupations . . .” (I: 39; 43). Opie’s use of “though” strongly emphasizes the gendered opposition between a woman’s domestic duties and a man’s worldly interests. “Though” inscribes readers’ expectations of gender roles. Adeline’s unconventional upbringing fosters her resistance to traditional female roles which is enacted through her sexuality and her intellectuality, the transgressive behavior at the root of her fall.

What I am calling Adeline’s “moments of resistance” include several pivotal events when Adeline dramatically defies customary female behavior with her sexuality. The central moment occurs when, at the age of eighteen, she determines to live with her lover, the free-love philosopher, Frederic Glenmurray, despite the objection of her mother who, ironically, introduced Adeline to his book. While Adeline is committed to his principles and is willing to defy social prejudice, her mother never had such an intention: “Little did I think that you were so romantic as to see no difference between amusing one’s imagination

with new theories and new systems, and acting upon them in defiance of common custom, and the received usages of society” (I: 112). Unlike her daughter, Mrs. Mowbray obeys strict cultural boundaries that confine people by gender and class.

Adeline's religious devotion to Glenmurray's principles of free love liberates her as a sexual woman. Once she avows Glenmurray's declamations against marriage, her mother's fiancé, Sir Patrick O'Carrol, begins to view her as “a susceptible and forward girl, endeavouring to hide her frailty under fine sentiments and high-sounding theories” (I: 121). For Sir Patrick, such women are cost-effective prostitutes. Of course, his licentiousness clouds his perception since Adeline advocates monogamous, heterosexual relationships that resemble legal marriages: she claims a public ceremony is not necessary for her to live with her lover. Though she believes herself virtuous, she is now considered a “kept” woman, or a “fallen” woman, and is defined exclusively by her sexuality.

As a sexually-liberated woman, Adeline is considered a threat to the social order that preserves female chastity. She is forbidden contact with socially respectable asexual women to avoid contaminating them. This custom prevents Adeline from being introduced to both Glenmurray's friend's sisters and his female cousins. Similarly, Adeline is believed to have influenced her servant, Mary Warner, to transgress proper female behavior by her example: “Mary, aware of the difficulty of procuring a service, if it were known that she had lived with a kept mistress . . .” wants Adeline to give her a character reference as Mrs. Glenmurray. Mary's future employer believes that “in contemplating [Adeline and Glenmurray's] union itself, she has lived in contemplation of vice” (II: 109-110).

Of course, the sexual woman also threatens the security of marriage. Adeline's mother blames her for seducing her husband away from her (II: 41). And, because it is outside of marriage, female sexuality threatens the sense of male property. Glenmurray wants to marry Adeline, not to protect her, we are told, but because “the true and delicate lover is always a monopolizer, always desirous of calling the woman of his affections his

own: it is not only because he considers marriage as a holy institution that the lover leads his mistress to the altar; but because it gives him a right to appropriate the fair treasure to himself,--because it sanctions and perpetuates the dearest of all monopolies, and erects a sacred barrier to guard his rights" (I: 104). A marriage based on the concept of monopoly, as we learn, can be corrupting. Adeline's marriage to Berrendale falls apart because of her sexual identity. His jealousy over her past sexual history destroys his faith in her and undermines his sense of ownership.

An important moment of resistance is Adeline's achievement of economic independence prior to her marriage to Berrendale. She agrees to the marriage under the condition that she work first. By gaining her financial independence, Adeline resists traditional notions of female dependency. Moreover, she engages in the "masculine" intellectual work of writing, "a method of getting money which she looked upon to be more rapid and more lucrative than working plain or fancy works" (III: 27).

But after her marriage deteriorates and she gives birth to a daughter, Adeline begins to believe that all she suffers are expiations for her "sins." Like Blake's Oothoon, she internalizes a fallen view of herself, but unlike Oothoon, she fails to eradicate her feelings of shame and guilt. This explains why there are few moments of resistance in the last third of the novel, but how are we to read this novel in light of its ending with Adeline's self-sacrificing death? While many contemporaries read Opie's book as a blatant critique of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's liberal lives and principles, others recognized the contradictions in Opie's portrayal of Adeline Mowbray.²⁰ Adeline may transgress feminine codes of sexual and intellectual behavior, but she is still a divine beauty and a domestic angel. Opie clearly suggests that the category of the ideal, domestic woman had its limitations. I would argue that Adeline's death indicates the extent to which a woman with

²⁰ See the discussion of The British Critic review in the Introduction of this dissertation.

her qualities and class identity lacked a definitive place in the social world.

The relationship between Adeline and her former servant, Mary Warner, a woman of disrepute who also becomes a “kept miss” illuminates the importance of class identity in female sexual expression. Mary works as Adeline's domestic servant for a brief time, but is dismissed for her poor performance and for arguing with Adeline about her status as a kept woman. Mary applies her definition of a kept lady to Adeline: “a lady who lives with a man without being married to him, I take it; and that I take to be your case, an't it, I pray?” (II: 98). Adeline resists identifying with a kept mistress, or the common prostitute: “But mistresses, or kept ladies in general, are women of bad character, and would live with any man; but I never loved, nor ever shall love, any man but Mr. Glenmurray.” As Mary points out, in the eyes of society there is no difference between these women. Thus, even when Mary credits Adeline with teaching her that “marriage was all nonsense,” Adeline refuses to acknowledge the similarity of their situations. Adeline's refusal is based upon class differences. Mary had said to her: “. . . you pretend [sic] to call yourself a gentlewoman, and to be better than other kept ladies! Why, you are not worthy to tie the shoestrings of my last mistress--she did not mind telling a lie rather than lose a poor servant a place. . .” (II: 100-101). Mary's revenge against Adeline is clearly about class differences. She resents the superiority of upper classes and questions why codes of moral behavior should apply differently to each class.

Though Mary blames Adeline for her own fall, mostly to make her feel guilty, Mary was clearly of “faulty” character before she met Adeline. Mary's questionable character can be attributed to her identity as a working-class woman from whom less propriety is expected. In her last appearance in Adeline's life, Mary looks like a prostitute: “rouged like a French countess of the ancien regime . . . and dressed in the height of the fashion” (III: 108). She is the mistress of Adeline's lawyer with whom she has a son. Mary is thrilled to remind Adeline of her own past as a mistress as revenge for Adeline's class bias.

Although Adeline is mistakenly convinced of her own responsibility for Mary's fall, she attempts to redeem herself by giving Mary a yearly allowance in her will to help her "quit her vicious habits" (291). Adeline's encounters with Mary suggest that Opie was careful not to associate her virtuous-fallen heroine with a fallen woman of the lower classes. Yet, as we shall see in Chapter Five, Adeline does form a deep friendship with her domestic servant, Savanna, who is much less malicious than Mary Warner. It appears that the boundaries between the ideal and fallen are further destabilized by class difference.

While Adeline Mowbray blurred the boundaries between ideal and fallen, Hays's Emma Courtney moves freely outside the bounds of the idealized, domestic woman. The memoirs of Emma Courtney are a young woman's account of her gender transgression. Emma's history from childhood to adulthood relates the many ways she defies the upper-class ideal of womanhood and acts like a prostitute, inviting a man's desire.

As a young child, Emma is captivated by adventure stories and romances which inspire her to learn how to read. By six, Emma fulfills her voracious desire to read and "began to think [her]self a wonderful scholar" (I; 17). Indeed, she reads between ten and fourteen books per week when she visits the circulating libraries as a twelve-year old and has access to her father's library when he commands her education when she turns fourteen. Her father succeeds in making her an intellectual, but is reprimanded by a dinner guest for violating traditional female qualities:

"Heavens, Mr. Courtney! you will spoil all her feminine graces; knowledge and learning, are insufferably masculine in a woman--born only for the soft solace of man! the mind of a young lady should be clear and unsullied, like a sheet of white paper . . . lines of thinking destroy the dimples of beauty; aping the reason of man, they lose the exquisite, *fascinating* charm, in which consists their true empire." (I: 34-5)

Emma's appetite for books clearly distinguishes her from other girls: her father tells her that she possesses "an understanding superior to [her] sex and age" (I: 50) and we know that the rambunctious Emma "hated the needle" (I: 19). Instead, her youthful days are colored by her lively imagination in which she becomes "the valiant knight--the gentle damsel--the adventurous mariner--the daring robber--the courteous lover--and the airy coquet" (I: 18). In her young adulthood, Emma's active imagination will open up alternative possibilities to the feminine ideal.

Emma associates the attainment of the feminine ideal with bodily pain. At boarding school, she tells us, "my actions were all constrained;--I was obliged to sit poring over needle work, and forbidden to prate;--my body was tortured into forms, my mind coerced, and tasks imposed upon me" (I: 20). Emma reluctantly writhes out of her childish androgyny as she transforms into a young woman and continues to resist conventional gender roles throughout her life. Emma rejects the soft, silent, passive, and pliant qualities of women for her own self-fashioning as an outspoken, aggressive, and commanding woman: "Shall I, then, sign the unjust decree, that women are incapable of energy or fortitude? . . . Do I mean always to deplore the prejudices which have, systematically, weakened the female character, without making any effort to rise above them?" (II: 16). She recognizes that gender distinctions in society are unfair: "the customs of society, then, have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman" (I: 71). Emma's "active spirit" and "abhorrence of a life of indolence and vacuity" motivate her desire for independence (I: 146).

Emma is often at odds with social customs, especially those that regulate female sexual behavior. Her fondness for the philosophical Mr. Francis, a visitor at the Morton's home is misinterpreted as love, and they are suspected of a secret engagement. Though Emma pays extraordinary attention to him, she is interested in him only as a mentor. Her guardians warn her that "there is a great indecorum in a young lady's making these

distinctions [to a man]" to which Emma defiantly replies, "I was not aware of these feminine, indelicate, unfriendly suggestions. If this behaviour be a specimen of what I am to expect in the world--the world may do its will--but I will never be its slave . . ." (II: 78; 82-3). Her guardians think her "a strange girl" and are most shocked by Mr. Francis's and Emma's promise to write each other. This incident prepares us for Emma's ultimate unorthodox action in which she vigorously persists in winning a lover through a letter-writing campaign.

For unattached women, the act of letter writing to men is transgressive. In this private act, they exhibit their access to language while they deny access to those who regulate their behavior. Their epistolary talents can even be criminal. Emma asks, "Was I, or was I not, guilty of an crime, when, in the very acme of the passions, I so totally disregarded the customs of the world?" (II: 84-5). Provoked by her imagination, for she loves him before she meets him, Emma encodes her sexual desire for her friend's son, Augustus Harley, in written language. In fact, there is a sexuality to her emotions: "a restless, an insatiable, curiosity, devoured me, heightened by feelings that every hour became more imperious, more uncontrollable" (II: 19-20). Emma's desire becomes the desire for truth, for Harley fails to declare himself.

Emma persistently searches for the truth in her letters to Harley, posing many questions, such as "*Is your heart, at present, free?*" which become more bold as she continues to write (I: 162). She demands of Harley, "write to me; *be ingenuous* ; I desire, I call for, truth!" In Emma's desire to know is the subtle desire of sexual knowledge. "*My friend--I would give myself to you* (II: 68) . . . I loved you, not only rationally and tenderly--*but passionately*--it became a pervading and a devouring fire!" (II: 77). She proposes to Harley: "Let us walk together into the palace of Truth, where . . . every one [sic] was compelled by an irresistible, controuling, power, to reveal his inmost sentiments"

(I: 180).²¹ The letters literalize the “palace of Truth,” by offering a *place* for truth to reside. Emma is the “irresistible, controuling, power” that invites him to truth, much as the priest coerces the confesser to truth. She assures Harley of the genuineness of her expressed desire and encourages him likewise to be ingenuous. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault finds the origins of “a veritable discursive explosion” about sex in the long history of the Christian confession and claims that confession was able to hand down to us in history the truth about sex (I: 17).

Essentially, Emma demands a reversal of their roles. She asks Harley to be the confesser while she listens. It takes many letters before Emma arrives at the vague truth of Harley's marriage. But, until that moment of revelation, Harley conforms to his role of hearing confession: he is silent. In fact, he chooses to be silent. Language seems inadequate for he claims not to know how to answer her (I: 174). He asks her, “what could I reply?” (II: 32). Not only does he make many excuses for not writing such as, “*he had not had time to write*” (II: 71), but he absents himself from her quite often (see II: 48). All these blanks contribute to Emma's growing frustration, pain, and despair.

Harley's silence reminds us of gender distinctions in language. While silence is gendered female and language is dominated by “the law of the father,” Hays intentionally assigns language to a female. We can anticipate, therefore, the well-known fears, still heard today, of women's articulation of political rights. Language in the hands of women must be discredited in order to maintain the dominant power structure. Emma, however, knowing she transgresses in language, proudly claims she “repents not” for inscribing female desire, a claim that explodes the codes of female propriety. When she speaks in public, she is thought to have “odd notions” that women with propriety do not voice. An invitation by a dinner guest for his hostess to visit his military encampment prompts her

²¹ According to Hays's footnote, she is referring to Madame de Genlis's Tales of the Castle.

admiration for soldiers to which Emma is invited to agree. Emma's disagreement that a soldier's trade is murder disrupts the entire dinner (II: 36-9). She continues to share her liberal views when the conversation turns to the insolence of domestic servants and slaves, groups which Emma believes are entitled to freedom.

Emma, like Burney's Elinor Joddrel, is quite aware that she overturns the conventions of love by taking the masculinist role of active pursuer. She admits to having "violated common forms" (II: 9), for the steps she has taken appear to her to be "so wild, and so romantic" (164). She suffers the "shame of being singular" knowing that "[t]hose who deviate from the beaten track must expect to be entangled in the thicket, and wounded by many a thorn--my wandering feet have already been deeply pierced" (I: 178-9). In transgressive acts that engaged her sexuality, Emma demonstrates the alternative possibilities to the idealized domestic woman who is defined by her lack of desire and her service to others.

Unlike Emma Courtney, whose lover is silent and whose desire for a relationship is unfulfilled, Maria Venables in Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman participates in a mutual romance developed through the written word. While imprisoned in a madhouse, she meets a fellow inmate, Henry Darnford, with whom she falls in love. As their love grows so does their language: inspired by the notes Darnford leaves in the margin, Maria writes back longer notes, and they maintain a regular correspondence. Like their love, their words are illicit and forbidden, transgressing the laws of the prison just as their meetings, the physical proximity to each other and their kisses are. Yet, they indulge in the physicality of their passion: "he took, with more ardour, reassured, a half-consenting, half-reluctant kiss, reluctant only from modesty . . . Desire was lost in more ineffable emotions . . . The emotion with which she, for a moment, allowed herself to be pressed to his bosom, . . . said--more of truth and faithfulness, than the tongue could have given utterance to in hours! They were silent--yet discoursed" (100). Silent discourse is a

distinctly recognizable feature of sensibility which is characterized by an inadequacy of language to express its feelings. But Maria demands female desire to transcend the modesty of sensibility. She, in fact, pleads for the legal right to women's passion and "claims" a divorce in order to live, however illicitly, in love. And, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Maria intentionally denies the charge of seduction in order to designate explicitly the power of female desire. Not only does she suggest a reform of marriage customs, she insists on a place for female sexuality.

Like Adeline Mowbray, Burney's Juliet Granville both accepts and resists the expectations of her gender. Juliet's masking of her class identity fails to hide the extent to which she conforms to an upper-class model of ideal womanhood. Juliet's acquaintances notice that "her education had been as successfully cultivated for intellectual improvement, as for elegant accomplishments" (83) when she demonstrates her expertise at needlework, dancing, drawing, singing, and playing the pianoforte and harp. When she gets ready for her theatrical debut, her friends are astonished by "the ease with which she wore her ornaments, the grace with which she set them off, the elegance of her deportment, and an air of dignified modesty, that spoke her not only accustomed to such attire, but also to the good breeding and refined manners, which announce the habits of life to have been formed in the superiour classes of society" (92). Juliet is, undoubtedly, the quintessential female object of desire.

As middle-class traditionalists and feminists warned, women who conformed to the upper-class standards of ideal womanhood may, as a consequence, attract unwanted sexual attention from men. Indeed, Juliet must ward off the advances of quite a few licentious men whether they are rural farmers or aristocratic libertines like Sir Lyell and Sir Jaspar. We are frequently shown men desiring Juliet, but rarely do we see her express her own desires. It appears that virtuous women must suppress their sexuality in order to protect

themselves.

However, Juliet's gender plays an important role in her identity. Catherine Craft-Fairchild remarkably observes that "Juliet is in fact far more dangerous to society than Elinor, for she is outside the patriarchal system of exchange--not because she is suicidal, homicidal, or mad, but because she has no name" (130). She extends Julia Epstein's argument that "to lack a name is to belong to no one" by insisting on a woman's dependence on men for a name. Thus, Craft-Fairchild claims, Juliet is appropriated by nearly every man in the novel in different ways (132). Juliet is a "loose woman," who, by not being claimed by members of society, is considered a threat to gendered boundaries (Craft-Fairchild 131).

Juliet's situation most resembles prostitution when she is forced to marry a greedy French official who wants her inheritance. Moreover, the closeness of Juliet's identity as a "Wanderer" to prostitution draws attention to her body as part of the patriarchal system of exchange.²² As she searches for a place in a patriarchal society, Juliet is vulnerable to sexual harassment, or "appropriation," by nearly every male she encounters because of her class ambiguity and her position as a sexual woman. Female sexuality, for Juliet, is debilitating and victimizing.

Though we are not to take her seriously, nor overlook her self-centeredness, the "freakish" feminist, Elinor Joddrel, provides an interesting contrast to Juliet's actions and words. While Juliet usually remains silent and unseen, Elinor is vocal, histrionic, and demands attention, breaking through the prohibition against female performance dictated by codes of propriety. Though scholars often interpret Elinor as a caricature of Wollstonecraft, I believe she figures as a dangerous example of how Wollstonecraft's ideas

²² Margaret Anne Doody also notices this connection: "Juliet is a Wanderer, like a beggar, like a Romantic poet, or--in a woman's case--like a prostitute. (Burney herself in *Dunkirk* in 1812 feared to be 'remarked as a Female Wanderer')" (329).

could be distorted for self-serving means. Some scholars view her caricature as a subversive strategy which Burney uses to obscure her support of feminism which she allows to be heard through Elinor, illustrating the extent to which feminism became discredited by 1814. Elinor, borrowing from Wollstonecraft, publicly speaks out against the idealized construction of woman:

what futile inconsistency dispenses this prejudice! This Woman, whom they estimate thus below, they elevate above themselves. They require from her, in defiance of their examples!--in defiance of their lures!--angelical perfection. She must be mistress of her passions; she must never listen to her inclinations; . . . she must always be guided by reason, though they deny her understanding!--Frankness, the noblest of our qualities, is her disgrace;--sympathy, the most exquisite of our feelings, is her bane! (399-400)

Elinor models herself on the ideal of an empowered womanhood: "her society was gay and original; and, to great quickness of parts, and liberality of feeling, she joined a frankness of character the most unbounded" (77). Her vivacity and maturity, and her engagement to Dennis Harleigh mark her as a sexual woman. She tells Juliet, "he had fallen desperately in love with me, either for my wit or my fortune, or both" (152). Having proven successful with Dennis, Elinor uses the assets of her personality, and her newly-found courage inspired by the French Revolution, to attract the attention and masculine desires of his brother, Albert. She transforms the social cause of women's rights into a "personal vindication." Though she owes "the precious privilege . . . of daring to think for myself" to revolutionary ideas, like those of Wollstonecraft, she reductively translates the empowerment of women solely to affairs of the heart: "must even her heart be circumscribed by boundaries as narrow as her sphere of action in life? Must she be taught to subdue all its native emotions? To hide them as sin, and to deny them as shame?" (177).

In defiance of custom, Elinor declares her love to Albert Harleigh in histrionic outbursts (174-175). Though her actions towards Harleigh are revolutionary, most of her resistance to the ideal for women is expressed solely through words. In this respect, she differs from Juliet who speaks little for women's rights, but acts defiantly by finding sources for women's economic independence.

Juliet resists conforming to the important requirement of women that keeps them in a state of dependency. "how insufficient , she exclaimed, is a FEMALE to herself! How utterly dependant upon situation--connexions--circumstance! how nameless, how forever fresh-springing are her DIFFICULTIES, when she would owe her existence to her own exertions!" (275). Juliet's story is about educated women of privileged backgrounds who are forced by circumstances to find work. Her placelessness as a wanderer is, quite obviously, representative of a woman's journey within limited social opportunity.²³ And, her namelessness for nearly two-thirds of the novel signifies the universality of her female experience. Understandably then, Margaret Doody terms her a "nameless Everywoman" (Introduction xv). Without claims to a family or a name, Juliet must move up and down the class scale. Juliet, in fact, is outcast--that is, driven from her country, and in a state of exile--and outcaste, in the sense of being expelled from a caste, or even existing outside a caste system: "I am in so forlorn a situation, that I must not wonder if you conclude me to be some outcast of society, abandoned by my friends . . . a poor destitute Wanderer, in search of any species of subsistence!" she tells Elinor (49). In her unusual identity as a social outcast, Juliet transgresses the boundaries of female propriety. She highlights the prejudices against women in a patriarchal world by participating in a public world governed by the "cash nexus" on her own terms. Of all the heroines under study, Juliet is the most

²³ Catherine Craft-Fairchild describes Juliet's frustrated attempts at work as part of Burney's stylistic excesses: "Burney emphasizes the futility of the woman's struggle through labored repetition. . . she pushes the subject to its limit. . . The pattern exposes the limitations of the woman's role through reenactment" (128).

successful worker.

Conclusion

With the increase in middle-class prosperity in the late-eighteenth century, and with critiques of the “female education” upper-class women received, traditionalists restricted women’s roles by creating an “ideal” who was selfless, subordinate, silenced, chaste, and whose domain was the home. Since there was no place for female sexuality in this idealized domestic woman, it was reserved for “fallen” women who fulfilled their desires and were sexually active, occupying public space. Similarly, laws regulating prostitution displaced female sexuality from domesticity by making all forms of it deviant outside of marriage. Our novelists raise the profile of sexuality in the prevailing discourse on womanhood and question the ideology behind the constructions of gender and the laws on prostitution. They create heroines who border both categories, ideal and fallen, private and public, wholly neither one nor the other. As the debate over women's social status was framed by the discourse of sexuality, the sexual woman as heroine emerges as an important ideological construct to undermine, or rather, redefine, the domestic woman. The categories of ideal and fallen also blur in the woman worker. Our heroines are unlike any other heroines in the novel because they transgress the boundaries of their sex through their sexuality and their desire for economic independence through work, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR ASSERTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS: FEMALE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

The necessity of directing the attention of females to some certain occupation is not so apparent, because custom has rendered them dependant [sic] upon their fathers and husbands for support; but as some of every class experience the loss of those relations, without inheriting an adequate resource, there would be great propriety in preparing each of them . . . to procure an independence for themselves . . . There is scarcely a more helpless object in the wide circle of misery which the vicissitudes of civilized society display, than a woman genteelly educated, whether single or married, who is deprived, by an unfortunate accident, of the protection and support of male relations; unaccustomed to struggle with difficulty, unacquainted with any resource to supply an independent maintenance, she is reduced to the depths of wretchedness, and not unfrequently, if she be young and handsome, is driven by despair to those paths which lead to infamy. (Reflections 65-66)

A woman who has lost her honour imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away. Losing thus every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge (Vindication 165)

In these extensive passages, both Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Wollstonecraft believe the single, (in)dependent woman is threatened with prostitution. My thesis is that because women writers could depend on a broad-based, collective, social attitude that viewed

prostitution as a social evil, they used the representation of the prostitute to sensationalize women's oppression. While some blamed the prostitute for her condition, feminists pointed to the larger social issues that made prostitution a necessity. They argued that prostitution resulted from the lack of education and employment of women, not “natural” female depravity. The prostitute reminded women of the few opportunities available to them.

Thus, the feminist writers employ the figure of the prostitute as a warning against the harmful effects of the social limitations imposed upon women. Since contemporary readers were “prejudiced” against equality between the sexes and women internalized these prejudices, radical women writers attempted to open up women's limited opportunities for independence by suggesting options to patriarchal dependence and marriage. Outside of this range of respectable paths toward independence always loomed the disreputable prostitute as an option.

By drawing attention to alternatives to the dominant social order, the prostitute embodies the social displacement of women. The prostitute as street-walker most powerfully symbolizes this displacement which also, we might add, characterizes woman's marginality. Like the domestic servant on the threshold, these working women were unstably situated in a no-man's land between the domestic and public worlds and in a sense freely floated between the two in brothel *houses* and public gardens. While middle-class reformers attempted to make work respectable for their class in the face of powerful opposing forces of convention, working-class culture had established the respectability of work for women primarily through economic necessity or labor requirements. Women in work undoubtedly presented a political paradox for conservatives and for the predominantly patriarchal social structure that attempted to control women and their sexuality through servitude. When a worker is female, it is still her sexuality and gender that defines her. Since the sexuality of the female worker is always noticed, it is

through the prostitute as a representation of the female worker's body that we can uncover how middle-class women were discouraged from working.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to late-eighteenth century proposals for female education and employment by women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Priscilla Wakefield and the heroines' related experiences. Our authors assert middle-class women's rights to education and work by depicting their heroines' difficulties in finding suitable work to support themselves and showing how close to prostitution such women may fall. Because working-class women like Wollstonecraft's Jemima who serve as models of independent workers fall into prostitution, we not only understand the extent to which prostitution threatened women workers, but the significance of class differences. Both working-class and middle-class women actually became prostitutes to survive. The educational and work experience of Frances Burney's heroine, Juliet Granville, is the subject of the second part of this chapter.

Working Women: Heroines or Whores?

Angered by the lack of work for middle-class women, late-eighteenth century feminists turned their attention to prostitution. Because the external causes for prostitution were found in an oppressive system of female education, as discussed in Chapter Three, and in unemployment, writers such as Priscilla Wakefield, in Reflections on the Present Condition of Women (1792), and Mary Ann Radcliffe, in The Female Advocate (1799), called attention to the need for women of all classes to be given more possibilities for work in order to decrease the number of prostitutes. Feminist writers offer one crucial explanation for the lack of work opportunities and job security, summed up by Radcliffe in her chapter, "The Fatal Consequences of Men Traders Engrossing Women's Occupations." Mary Hays also complains about this takeover in her Appeal. In the late 1790s, women who went shopping for their hats, ribbons, lace or dress material would

find men, not women, ready to take their orders. The “fatal consequences” were that of the unemployed and unprotected woman finding a subsistence-level pay in prostitution. They recognized that middle-class women who wanted or needed to work had to be protected from becoming prostitutes. According to Wakefield, middle-class and upper-class women were discouraged from working; they faced social ostracism, diminished their chances of an advantageous marriage, and were victims to discrimination. Wakefield believes that an improved female education could eradicate such barriers.

The prostitute, for Mary Ann Radcliffe, most conspicuously represents “the distresses of women” (404). In The Female Advocate, Radcliffe blurs the identity of her subject so that both the figure of the prostitute and the middle-class woman cannot be distinguished. The prostitute is never named as such, nor is the word “prostitution” used, though the term, “Magdalen,” appears. Thus, in her lack of a name, the prostitute is universalized to stand for women's oppression in general: “objects of distress,” “most miserable of beings,” “poor females,” “the most helpless part of creation,” “helpless females.” Specifically, Radcliffe focuses on unprotected middle-class women, and reclaims their rights to work in fierce opposition to the contemporary domestic role that conditions them to submission and idleness. Since she excludes “those whom a kind Providence hath placed under the immediate care of a tender father, or an affectionate and kind husband; or, *by chance*, a friend, or brother” (404), we are left, then, with the single woman of the novels: Julia Clifford, Emma Courtney, Adeline Mowbray, and Juliet Granville. The “distresses,” for example, become the wanderer's “female difficulties.” Radcliffe, however, offers a documentary-like, rather than a fictional, portrayal of unfortunate women.¹

¹ Though she claims to give factual examples and has to omit the names of women, her descriptions remain vague and seemingly hypothetical. This attempt at describing an urban reality is praiseworthy, for we do not see such journalistic endeavors until the mid-nineteenth century and by the time Henry Mayhew comes out with his massive volumes of interviews and surveys of the London poor, readers

The women Radcliffe chooses as her subjects are distinctly middle class. One has a genteel education and was raised within the confines of a domesticity that left her unprepared for beggary and the imprisonment mandated by the Vagrant Act: "She, who, perhaps, was reared with all the gentle softness and maternal care of a fond parent; she, who so lately was looked upon as an ornament to her sex until the pressure of misfortunes compelled her to seek for bread, to be at once confined in a dark prison . . . Can we see the tender and delicate frame, which was formerly accustomed to ease and tranquillity . . ."

(413). She also includes widows "who, after a life of affluence [are found] in the abject and forlorn condition just described" (427). Radcliffe even relates the tale of a young man's encounter with a woman on the street who, evidently well-educated, spoke French, Italian and Latin. Other examples include "a gentleman's daughter, one of those well-bred young ladies . . . [and] a tradesman's daughter . . . they being equally trained up in the same liberal plan of female education" (451; 461).

Radcliffe describes class distinctions that are integral to our understanding of the threat of prostitution to middle-class women. She tells us that the tradesman's credit depends upon his appearance whereas the nobleman knows "independence and ancestry will always command respect" (451). The middle class is forced to spend beyond their means for the sake of appearances; their lives are profoundly insecure. Furthermore, their businesses and family fortunes rely on a fickle market: "how frequent and sudden are the fluctuations in the stocks, owing to the artifices of stock-jobbers ². . . but for poor women, the weight of all these grievances must unavoidably rest upon them" (452). In this example she demonstrates what would happen if a husband died, a misfortune that would lead to

are quite familiar with statistical research and journalism.

² A stockjobber is "1. an operator in the stock exchange who deals only with brokers, not with the public. 2. a stockbroker or stock salesman: often contemptuous." Stock-jobbing is "the practice or business of dealing in stocks or shares: often used in a disparaging sense" (Webster's 1791).

further distress. The family would have a small provision because the businessman would have spent all his earnings on appearances. Thus, the family would be left without money or any means of support. Radcliffe insists this is a common occurrence, as she certainly knew from her own experience. According to Gina Luria, "She, herself, experiences the plight of the eighteenth century gentlewoman saddled with a kindly but ineffectual husband and swarm of children, who casts about for independence through employment, only to discover that there is only one occupation which women can easily choose" (Introduction 3-4). Moreover, "She knew of what she spoke since, to provide for her children, she herself had been a lady's companion, governess, pastry-shop keeper, and seller of patent medicines and shoes" (Todd, Dictionary 10).

Class-based gender distinctions confine women to an insular, domestic life, and limit their social opportunities, according to Radcliffe. In the smaller scale of life of the past, the organization of labor gave women an important role: "while the father and the brother were employed in trade, the mother and daughters were employed in the domestic concerns of the household. In fact, they were then the manufacturers also, and consequently were never at a loss for employment; they found enough to do in spinning, knitting, and preparing necessities for the use of the family, which, being common, was not looked upon as any degradation" (431). In contrast, contemporary women who work can ruin the reputation of a tradesman. As Davidoff and Hall remind us in their study of the middle class, "this crossing of such a significant [gender] boundary, if made visible could be taken as a sign of social inferiority when social status was crucial to building a picture of creditworthiness. The equation of women with domesticity came to be one of the fixed points of middle-class status" (275). Of course, there was a distinct contradiction between what Davidoff and Hall uncover as the middle-class woman's active participation in the household and family business and the need for the appearance of an idle lifestyle (286). Radcliffe attacks these social constructions by exposing them as artificial and

unjust: "It is the etiquette of the time for the daughters to be bred fine ladies, although it be without a fortune, either dependent or independent to support it. As for trade, that is out of the question. The sons, indeed, are differently provided" (447).

For Radcliffe, women in desperate circumstances, with so few opportunities available to work and with so little compassion from others, especially from those who could employ them in their homes, turn to prostitution. This is where identities start to blur. The prostitute, woman at her most desperate state, can come from the ranks of the middle class. Not until the "effeminate tradesmen" leave their positions as mantua-makers, stay-makers and milliners can women find means of support. Radcliffe displaces the dominant domestic ideology which valorizes the submissive and dependent woman and deems the worker a "fallen" woman. She argues that this domesticity is precisely what damages women and keeps them from being educated and employed in the public sphere.

Like Wollstonecraft and Wakefield, Radcliffe must step gently over the constructs of femininity as she counterattacks what has been established by this time as the "natural" abilities, qualities and duties of women. She writes in the language her rivals understood, the discourse of natural law, contesting the idea that woman "was ever intended by Divine Providence . . . to receive so many piercing darts from the sons of her bosom, as her only reward for all that maternal affection and kindness . . ." (408). But, undoubtedly, Radcliffe is a social constructionist; Part Second, in fact, "demonstrates that the frailty of female virtue more frequently originates from embarrassed circumstances, than from a depravity of disposition" (439). Thus, the theory of social construction helped feminists deflect blame from woman and her sexuality to distinct outside causes which were out of her control.

Mary Wollstonecraft also identifies distinct socio-cultural causes for women's subordinate social position and uses prostitution to stand for women's oppression. In Vindication, Wollstonecraft argues that women have been educated and conditioned to be

weak and dependent on men by their preparation for marriage. She blames writers like Rousseau, Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Gregory, Hester Thrale Piozzi, Lord Chesterfield and a host of others for proposing and advising a limited female education based on natural distinctions of obedience and servitude. And, she attributes long-established beliefs about gender distinctions being natural (for women, “dependence is called natural”) to effects of the environment and education: chapter nine of her manifesto is titled, “Of the Pernicious Effects which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society.”

Wollstonecraft's social constructionism is embedded in her language throughout the text: the adjective “habitual” replaces the use of “natural.” Moreover, the feminist arguments heard in the novels also reflect the social construction of women’s roles and behavior.³

Similarly, Priscilla Wakefield in her Reflections advocates the importance of reforming female education for the improvement of women's status. And, like Wollstonecraft, Wakefield blames “a contracted education, custom, false pride, and idolizing adulation” for stunting women's potential. Her argument opposes the orthodoxy that a female's “natural” deficiencies are biologically determined: “In civilized nations it has ever been the misfortune of the sex to be too highly elevated, or too deeply depressed . . . The result of this improper treatment has been a neglect of the mental powers” (6). She insightfully blames the social construction of woman for woman's imagined weaknesses. While attempting to broaden the female experience, Wakefield must, at the same time, discuss woman's position within the “exact limits of modesty and decorum” in order to protect “the delicacy and reserve of the female character” (9). Furthermore, she finds gender distinctions to be obstacles to improvement: “the sphere of feminine action is contrasted by numberless difficulties, that are no impediments to masculine exertions” (9). We also encounter the conflict between these two disparate educational aims in the novels

³ In particular, see Emma Courtney's “Cruel prejudices” speech on page 201 of this chapter.

under study. Julia Clifford in Helen Maria Williams's novel Julia is troubled by the scenes of women's dissipation in which she is forced to participate in London.⁴ Adeline Mowbray is taught household management by her grandmother since her mother provides her only with intellectual training. Radcliffe's, Wakefield's, and Wollstonecraft's proposals for a new kind of female education clearly show how they differ from similar critiques by the middle class that supported the formation of domestic woman.

At the time Wollstonecraft and Wakefield were writing, middle and upper-class women did receive education in the form of accomplishments. Wollstonecraft argues that the "smattering of accomplishments" women learned such as embroidery, dancing, music, and painting, left them with "almost no marketable skills" (Vindication 83). However, her practice did not always conform to her theory. When she reached Ireland in October, 1786, as governess to the Kingsboroughs, an aristocratic family, she tells her sister that she is "grieved at being obliged to continue so wrong a system" as female education for accomplishments (Wardle 124). Wakefield, too, is very much against the superficial education for "ornamental acquisitions." As one critic explains, "women's goal is not to accomplish but to be 'accomplished'" (Lowder-Newton 56). Limiting female education to accomplishments dramatizes the lack of training and respectable work for women.

In the novels under study, accomplishments are put to a use for which they were never intended--and to which they were diametrically opposed--female employment. Emma Courtney's accomplishments fit her for service in the education of a family's daughters three days a week (I: 182-183). Juliet Granville's skills as a musician, actress, and artist also enable her to earn money: defying the uselessness of her accomplishments, "the Incognita now thankfully rejoiced in the blessing bestowed upon her, by that part of her education, which gave to her the useful and appropriate female accomplishment of

⁴ Julia's conflict is discussed at length in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

needle-work” (Burney 78). Though Juliet triumphs, Burney suggests by this contrast between usefulness and uselessness that women need better education and better opportunities for putting their talents to use.

Mary Wollstonecraft's attempts to achieve her own financial independence informs us of the options available to a single, middle-class woman in the late-eighteenth century. Like the fictional feminists, Emma Courtney and Adeline Mowbray, Wollstonecraft is limited to teaching and professional writing. Disappointingly, she comes up with few answers to the question she poses in Vindication: “But what have women to do in society? . . . which might save many from common and legal prostitution” (260-1). Wollstonecraft hopes that an “attempt to earn their own subsistence” would not “sink them almost to the level of those poor abandoned creatures who live by prostitution. For are not milliners and mantua-makers reckoned the next class?” She offers the occupations of physician, midwifery, and business as possibilities, but she concludes that “the few employments open to women, so far, from being liberal, are menial” (261). Limitations, she insists, are imposed by a lack of a substantial and meaningful education. Similarly, Priscilla Wakefield devotes an entire chapter to advising women on possible career opportunities. Her list is the most extensive of all the writers; it far exceeds Wollstonecraft's imagination and includes ways to earn money by: literary and fine arts skills, printing, coloring of prints, needlework designs, engraving, landscaping, and even acting on stage.

Clara Reeve's Plans of Education (1792), an epistolary fiction in which “Mrs. Darnford,” a former governess, shares her ideas for women's education with her aristocratic friend, Lady A, also contains suggestions for female employment. Though Darnford's plan for female education is designed to uphold strict class boundaries, she includes advice for how middle-class women can earn a living in various trades. Reeve's protagonist appropriates for the middle class the system of training designed for the poor. She proposes to her middle-class readers that they should learn various trades such as

millinery and lacemaking. Likewise, Mary Ann Radcliffe insists on “breaking through the fashions of the times” by having young women placed in trades just as their brothers. These arguments for the expansion of middle-class women's education and employment had much support in the growing feminist movement of the late-eighteenth century. Davidoff's and Hall's account of the middle class also describes the numerous occupations women engaged in, primarily trade, teaching, and innkeeping. Apparently, women were able to survive “as part of a family or household enterprise” (313).

In the novels, discouraging obstacles undermine our heroines' search for a means to independence. Once she is determined to establish her independence, Hays's Emma Courtney only imagines the possibility of officiating “as an assistant, in the school” she attended as a child. And, when she attempts to find a more meaningful position to avoid “the degradation of servitude,” she comes up with few options. She finds temporary employment educating the daughters of a gentlewoman three mornings a week (I: 184). Opie's Adeline Mowbray, too, finds work in teaching; she sets up a day-school in a village where she is unknown. Unfortunately, her success is marred by the accusations of her former servant, Mary Warner, and she is condemned for her past sexual history. The only other path she succeeds in is writing hymns and tales for children which she is able to sell for a small profit. Wollstonecraft's Maria Venables describes the difficulties of finding female employment: “My sisters . . . were accomplished, yet you can (may you never be reduced to the same destitute state!) scarcely conceive the trouble I had to place them in the situation of governesses, the only one in which even a well-educated woman, with more than ordinary talents, can struggle for a subsistence; and even this is a dependence next to menial . . . [my sister] had abilities sufficient to have shone in any profession, had there been any profession for women, though she shrunk at the name of milliner or mantua-maker as degrading to a gentlewoman” (148). Maria's experience closely resembles Wollstonecraft's who also had to find employment for her sisters as governesses.

The direct experience with the limited availability of options for gentlewomen frequently inspires our heroines to attack the prevailing social order which maintains gender distinctions in the labor market. Maria Venable wonders: "Why was I not born a man, or why was I born at all?" (139). And, in an often-quoted passage, Emma Courtney declares:

Cruel prejudices!--I exclaimed--hapless woman! Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamant chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell? (I: 55)

She angrily asks, "Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman--*crushed, and then insulted*--why call her to *independence*--which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? *This is mockery!* (II: 107). The theme that emerges over and over in each of these novels is that of women's failure to achieve independence. The metaphoric "magic circle" and bird cage, and the literal prison cell that confines these women are socially constructed gender distinctions. Women in their social status, lower-middle to upper-middle class, attempt to create a new paradigm of woman by first deconstructing existing codes of behavior. They cannot succeed until new systems of education and employment are established. Thus, the failures that each heroine experiences lead us closer to reform, for they undoubtedly establish the need for a women's rights campaign.

Consequently, the failure to attain "self-dependence" makes them rely on the traditional system of patriarchal dependence: marriage. When Emma returns to London and finds herself alone and unemployed, she is led to marriage as a last alternative. Marriage, thus, is based on the failure of a woman to sustain independence. Our heroines enter into

marriage, however, under their own terms. Both Adeline Mowbray and Emma Courtney, as well as Juliet in *The Wanderer*, prefer the hardships of work to exchanging themselves as the property of men. Emma, for example, tells her future husband, "I would perish, rather than take advantage of a generosity like yours. I will go to service . . ." (II: 157). Adeline, likewise, is "unwilling to be under so many pecuniary obligations to a man whom she did not love" (III: 29). And Juliet feels the same way about spending the £100 lent to her by her friend, Harleigh. She confesses to him "that I have committed the most dreadful of mistakes . . . an intentionally unacknowledged, usage of some of the notes which you forced into my possession . . . The instant, by any possible means,--by work, by toil, by labour,--nothing will be too severe,--all will be light and easy,--that can rectify,--that-- . . ." She fears that the more generous Harleigh may be, "the more readily [he] will imagine---" (594). The failure of language, that silent gap, informs us of that which cannot be spoken. She fears that spending Harleigh's money will sexualize their relationship. In a traditional marriage arrangement, the bride's dowry is received as payment for her support, thereby limiting her contribution to the workforce. But, in a feminist arrangement, the bride's money constructs an egalitarian relationship. These heroines, distasteful as marriage is to them, want to retain their independence in marriage. And, underlying the unwillingness of the young women to receive money is the image of the prostitute.

Our heroines not only resist dependence in marriage, but resist most conventional female behavior. By working, our heroines courageously contest restrictions on the middle-class, domestic woman which kept her dangerously insulated from the outside world. As Wollstonecraft's, Wakefield's, and Radcliffe's texts show, feminist reforms for female education and employment put forth in the late-eighteenth century were centered on the prostitute as a symbol of woman's lack of opportunities.

Domestic Servants and Prostitution

In sum, according to traditional middle-class gender ideology, middle-class women risked coming dangerously close to prostitution if they chose to work. With their desire for independence and intellectual attainments, such women transgressed the boundaries of femininity and threatened the social order. The prostitute, for middle-class feminists, symbolized the paucity of opportunities for women's employment and education. Because domestic service and prostitution were not appropriate positions for genteel women, feminists argued for the expansion of women's education and employment beyond prostitution.

Working-class women, on the other hand, had always worked, usually serving the needs of the upper classes. As domestic servants, milliners, haberdashers, and so on, working-class women lacked job security. Thus, for working-class women, prostitution was a reality, not a symbolic threat. This section focuses on Wollstonecraft's *Jemima* and evidence from social history to illustrate the close proximity of working-class women to prostitution, validating the claims of middle-class feminists that women were always threatened with a life of prostitution if they worked, though it appears to be a particular problem for working-class women.

Jemima, the asylum attendant of the heroine, Maria Venables, in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* is the only three-dimensional working-class woman in all the novels under study. In her autobiographical account, she describes the sexual and economic exploitation of working women. In fact, Jemima owes her birth to such exploitative conditions for her mother was seduced by a fellow servant. Jemima's illegitimate status mars her for life; she tells Maria that she was "despised from my birth, and denied the chance of a footing for myself in society. I was, in fact, born a slave" (106). While still a young child, she must work as a servant to her father and his new

wife, catering to the demands of their new baby. A little later she is bound as a domestic servant apprentice to her step-mother's friend. While working as a domestic servant at sixteen, Jemima is raped by her master: "One day . . . he contrived to be alone in the house with me, and by blows--yes; blows and menaces, compelled me to submit to his ferocious desire" (106). Her master forces her to have sex many other times. But when his wife discovers them together and that Jemima is pregnant, Jemima is thrown out of the house. She has nowhere to turn: "To my father's roof I had no claim" (108). When one of the master's shopworkers meets Jemima that night on the street, he informs the master of her condition. To prevent scandal, the master sends her a half-guinea for her lodgings.

Jemima not only lacks protection, she lacks the means to find employment, especially without a character reference. Thus, she gains "independence" from the jobs she finds out on the streets:

I went into the neighbouring streets to beg, and my disconsolate appearance drew a few pence from the idle, enabling me still to command a bed; till, recovering from my illness, and taught to put on my rags to the best advantage, I was accosted from different motives, and yielded to the desire of the brutes I met, with the same detestation that I had felt for my still more brutal master. I have since read in novels of the blandishments of seduction, but I had not even the pleasure of being enticed into vice. (109)

Not only does Jemima's rape lead to prostitution, but so do intolerant work conditions and a lack of job security. After working as a prostitute, she returns to domestic service in order to escape persecution by watchmen and the law. However, the violent temper of her mistress who often threatens her with dismissal forces her to accept the offer of a man to be his kept mistress. With this literary man, she gains access to male discourse, improves her reading and writing, and saves up some money: her goal is to gain respectability in society. When he suddenly dies, she is left again without any resources. As an unskilled worker,

she has few options. She discovers that she cannot compete with the dexterity and speed of needle-workers who are in huge supply. Her long search for employment ends when she finally manages to find work washing laundry, a job with hours from 1 a.m. until 8 p.m. Jemima perceives that gender distinctions were operative: “you will allow me to observe, that this was a wretchedness of situation peculiar to my sex. A man with half my industry, and I may say, abilities, could have procured a decent livelihood . . . whilst I . . . was cast aside as the filth of society” (115-16). When an injury prevents her from working, she is sent to the dreaded workhouse and from there she is offered the attendant position at the insane asylum for £40, a position that gives her job security, but not middle-class status. Jemima’s work history realistically describes the options for employment allowed working-class women: “the harsh fact about eighteenth-century employment opportunities was that apart from slaving as a seamstress, [prostitution and domestic service] were the only two major occupations open to an uneducated girl from a poor family” (Stone 617). Prostitution was often a better alternative to the long, tedious hours of menial work. Even Mary Hays’s Emma Courtney recognizes the preference of prostitution for middle-class women to “the degradation of servitude:”

hapless woman!—crushed by the iron hand of barbarous despotism,
pampered into weakness, and trained the slave of meretricious folly!—what
wonder, that, shrinking from the chill blasts of penury (which the
pernicious habits of thy education have little fitted thy tender frame to
encounter) thou listenest to the honied accents of the spoiler; and, to escape
the galling chain of servile dependence, rushest into the career of infamy,
from whence the false and cruel morality of the world forbids thy return,
and perpetuates thy disgrace and misery! (II: 149)

Faced with sexual exploitation, mistress’ tempers, and the lack of respect and status as a prostitute, Jemima lacks job security for most of her working life.

Similarly, much of the evidence in labor history discloses the open path to prostitution followed by working-class girls. Low-paying and seasonal female trades such as lace-making, mantua-making, and millinery made it difficult for women to sustain themselves and avoid prostitution.⁵ In particular, domestic service, a trade which Jemima enters, often led directly to prostitution. Historian Dorothy Marshall records the demise of these impoverished girls:

most of the girls were bound out to learn the art of a housewife, which in practice meant that they became household drudges. For what could a girl bound out to a "Linen Weaver," who probably occupied one or two rooms, learn that would be of use to her in getting a better place later? It was from this class of poor parish girls, who were thrust at the most impressionable age into poverty-stricken, and, only too often, degraded surroundings, that the class of street walkers and pick-pockets was recruited. For it was very seldom that such poor girls were placed in respectable families

(English Poor 195)

Consequently, prostitution "was the result in great measure of low wages, the lack of reserves for times of unemployment, the limited opening available for women and the general economic conditions which ruled in women's employment" (Pinchbeck, Women Workers 311).

In his dissertation, Social Attitudes Toward Prostitution, historian Stanley Nash uncovers evidence of the belief that the instability of domestic service employment was a cause of prostitution in Committee on Police reports, periodicals like Gentleman's Magazine and Lloyd's Evening Post, the writings of influential magistrates and

⁵ The connection between prostitution and female trades is also made by Engels; Rule; Tilly, Scott, Cohen; Marshall, The English Poor; Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution, Ch. 6; Nash, Social Attitudes pp. 441 and 447 and Campbell, pp. 206-9; 226-8.

middle-class reformers Saunders Welch, Patrick Colquhoun, and their critics, like William Hale during the period of 1758 and 1817. Such a widespread belief cannot be ignored. However, because there was a growing shortage of servants in middle-class families during the late-eighteenth century, Nash believes the goal of the charities for prostitution, largely supported by the middle-class, to train prostitutes for domestic service, essentially fulfilled “a socio-economic need of their class” (Social Attitudes 448). Furthermore, Trumbach's histories of young prostitutes vividly demonstrate that those found in London often worked as servants before being seduced or introduced into earning an income by sexual favors. These were the daughters of the London poor, and not, as it is supposed, those from the country. Some who came to London seeking work as a servant were met by wagons and whisked away to bawdy-houses (Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution). One historian of prostitution, Nickie Roberts, describes a Mrs. Wisebourne who “toured the inn and taverns every morning to pick up girls fresh from the country” for her thriving trade in virgins (161). Evidently, working-class women who became domestic servants risked becoming prostitutes, a reality that seems to have influenced those who did not want middle-class women to work.

The Woman Worker in Frances Burney's The Wanderer

Of all the heroines who have trouble finding work and earning a living, much like most middle-class women at the end of the eighteenth century, Burney's heroine, Juliet Granville, goes through the most difficulty, works the most extensively, is victimized by sexual exploitation and threatened with prostitution, much like Jemima. This novel is primarily about work, that is to say, women working. Margaret Doody explains that, “Burney transcended the customary middle-class attitudes to work as something for which members of lower classes should be grateful, as she escaped from the condescending view of workers as given to idleness . . . Burney examines the sheer *drudgery* involved in such

labor . . . asking not if her *heroine* is to be pitied for having so to descend, but whether the *work* as at present organized is something which it is right to ask of other human beings" (355). Though Doody's conclusions are accurate, they are universalized, whereas I believe Burney exposes both gender and class inequities. Burney is able to conduct such an examination with Juliet who is uprooted from her privileged class position and entered into the rank of laborer. Since we do not see male workers we are led to question the situation of "unprotected" single women in the late 1790s.

The personal and political conflicts involved in women working, women's education and women's sexual identity are raised in this novel through the heroine's search for a class identity. Though there are many suggestions throughout the novel that Juliet is a member of the upper class, she takes on the identity of a working-class woman out of necessity and participates in the social reality of working-class culture. Because of her class ambiguity and class-crossing, she dramatically exposes the contrast between the idealized and the lived experiences of the working class and the instability of class identity for women. As a displaced figure, Juliet also uncovers the tension between the capitalistic relationship of consumer and producer. Appropriately, she is engaged as a servant, a position, like that of the governess, which was unstably situated at the edge of class boundaries.⁶ In some ways, the domestic servant served the same functions as the moral reformers' aim of education: to maintain a distinct class hierarchy. Literally, it was their "life on the threshold," to borrow Sarah C. Maza's term, that characterized the social position of the servant: "the threshold symbolically captures the essence of the servants' condition" (Maza 136). Servants, like the footman or the butler, controlled the flow of public access to the master and his family (Turner 160). Therefore, from the threshold,

⁶ See Chapter 5, "The Anathematized Race: The Governess in *Jane Eyre*" in Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments*. Poovey argues that the governess functioned as a class barrier and was associated with unregulated female sexuality, and the fallen woman.

they retained power and protection. But it was a position which also invited resentment from peers and abuse from superiors. Juliet, as outsider, yet participant in the lower and upper classes, fundamentally assumes an ambiguous position much like the eighteenth-century domestic servants who generally came from the working class. If we remember, Richardson's *Pamela* expresses much anxiety over returning to her lower-class family after being in service to a wealthy family who gave her lady's clothes and a lady's education. Worried that she will not fit in at home, she trades in her lady's clothes for simpler clothes and a straw hat and recognizes her new need for money, not learning. Juliet's ambiguity is not owing entirely to domestic service. For the most part, it is her status as a single woman, outside the boundaries of patriarchal control, that makes her position ambiguous and allows the shadow of the prostitute to be seen vividly in her presence.

Juliet, as you may recall, is a fugitive from her mercenary husband in France, who is forced to hide her identity and to depend on others because she cannot make a legal claim on her family in England. Without friends, family, a home or financial resources, she must support her independence through work but encounters many "female difficulties" as the novel's subtitle foreshadows. Thus, Juliet turns her talents and accomplishments into financial resources: she gives music lessons on the harp and does freelance needlework and lace-making, but she also works in a millinery shop and as a domestic servant. While those who encounter Juliet have trouble identifying her by class, we can confidently place her in the laboring classes. Although we are frequently reminded of her noble origins, Juliet is dependent on a wage. As an "unprotected" woman—both physically and financially—she shares the same fate as lower-class women. She is subject to unfair labor practices, labor shortages, sexual exploitation, and the alternative of prostitution. Of course, Juliet works only because she is forced to by the unusual circumstances occasioned by the French Revolution, but we shall see how she takes the subject position of the

worker.⁷ The vulnerability of working women increased by the late-eighteenth century when the wage contract began replacing the patriarchal master-servant relationship (Trumbach, *Rise* 141). As a consequence, the social gap between employers and workers widened and women lost their master's protection.

In *The Wanderer*, dress usually reveals social status. Hence, part of the confusion over how social superiors should treat Juliet is based primarily on her appearance. Before her metamorphosis, Juliet appears in the “most ordinary attire” and because her tattered dress appears shabby and vulgar, she is treated with little respect. She is reduced to an anonymous “body” by members of the upper class like Mrs. Ireton. They do not know whether “such a body” belongs in the doorway or in the kitchen; both of which are servants' places. However, because dress is assumed to be a class marker, Juliet is able to use it easily for disguise. She finds a straw bonnet and apron to disguise herself as working class as she travels alone on the open country road. Unfortunately, instead of rendering her invisible, her disguise only draws more attention to her, subjecting her to immodest proposals and badgering from local men. In effect, her declassing transforms her into a sexual object bringing the inequities of sex and class to the forefront of her journey.

Class distinction was so embedded in the clothes of the self-consciously class-based England of the eighteenth century that a Frenchman would observe by the late-nineteenth century that “custom had determined the clothes and general attire of every person to such an extent that not only could one recognize the dress of the upper classes from that of the lower orders, but even within the latter certain nuances were significant

⁷Though most feminist critics describe the span of occupations available to Juliet, class politics are subsumed under the more dominant politics of gender, revealing a desperate need for a class-based analysis. Of all the critics, Margaret Doody offers the most extensive economic and social analysis of work (350–361). While my analysis is similar to Doody's—we both employ the concept of Marxist alienation—I differ by examining work within the context of the feminist demand for reform.

enough to reveal the estate of the profession of the wearer at a glance” (Maza 118).⁸ The ornamented and ostentatious female body of the privileged classes, obscured by feathers and finery, is displayed in hideous contrast to the bare body of the working-class female. According to one historian, “servants were considered a class apart, and as such they had to remain visibly distinct” (Maza 123).⁹ Moreover, historians have argued that the practice of giving servants clothing or uniforms depersonalized them. In particular, both in France and England the very wealthy dressed their male servants in a conspicuous livery costume.¹⁰ The servant-keeping class vociferously argued in favor of using dress to designate class differences though they gave their servants their cast-off clothing. Clothing was considered, by servants, to be one of their job's valuable fringe benefits. The common practice of servants imitating the dress of their mistresses led to even stronger advice and warnings by masters and mistresses to wear simpler dress as the century progressed. The fear of not being able to distinguish servant from master seems grounded in the fear of class levelling or class takeover (Marshall, English Domestic 19-20). Because devoted servants were hard to find, masters' dependence on servants made them vulnerable to losing them (Marshall, English Domestic 27). Trumbach explains that a

⁸ The writer is François Besnard, author of Mémoires d'un nonagénaire. 2 vols. Paris, 1880.

⁹ Maza's observations and arguments about the servant-master relationship in eighteenth-century France are certainly applicable to England during the same time period.

¹⁰ Ernest Sackville Turner, in What the Butler Saw, tells us that “The footman's livery was the fashion discarded by gentlemen of the previous century: knee breeches, silk stockings with buckles, embroidered coat with shoulder knot, powdered wig, top hat. Most masters provided a footman with his livery, which ensured a smart turn-out and gave them the chance to threaten to ‘strip’ an offender if he misbehaved” (170). In this last sentence Turner refers to the livery's function as a representation of the power and prestige of his master or the master's family. Similarly, Sarah C. Maza tells us of the “symbolism implicit in the ribbons, gold braid, or shoulder knots that decorated the uniforms” of the French servant in the decades before the Revolution (119). These ornaments derive from the conspicuous emblem of the servant's condition that was supposed to be part of the uniform (Maza 119). See also Cissie Fairchilds, Domestic Enemies, p. 103.

servant's devotion decreased as the system of the patriarchal household was replaced by the domestic, nuclear family. The master's "little" family gradually separated from his servants, or "great" family, and the master took on the role of employer. Furthermore, their relationship was now governed by a wage contract, rather than the dependency of paternalism. As a result, "there was an attempt to abolish a servant's traditional perquisites" (*Rise* 123). Moreover, Trumbach claims that "the social gulf between master and servant deepened when the lesser gentry ceased to serve as the household's servants of state" (*Rise* 123).

Juliet's shift in class consciousness develops gradually. She finds work as a milliner in a shop with young working-class women who are equally dependent on a wage. While employed at Miss Matson's millinery shop, Juliet observes and learns much about a worker's life. She sees "the total absence of feeling and of equity, in the dissipated and idle, for the indigent and laborious" (427). In fact, there are many times when Juliet, as a worker, has seen class differences in the faults of the rich. Daily, she encounters their lack of empathy seen in their lack of payment for goods and services and their inability to see from any perspective except the one they are bound within as consumers.

At Miss Matson's she also discovers the vulnerability of working-class women to sexual assault and misconduct. One of the girls, in particular, the misguided sixteen-year old, Flora Pierson, evokes Juliet's concern because she has become the object of Sir Lyell Sycamore's sexual desire, the same libertine who pursued Juliet. Flora, like most working-class girls, dreams of rising above her class through marriage. However, Sir Lyell acts very much like the officers in town who "chose to deem all the *unprotected* young women whom they thought worth observance their natural prey" (428; italics mine). Dazzled by his attention and expensive gifts, Flora blindly trusts Sir Lyell and follows his directions to arrange a private visit. She feigns a headache in order to be dismissed from church early one Sunday and secretly returns to her room. Though Flora is aware of the

impropriety of her conduct—meeting or talking with Sir Lyell alone—she is reassured by his higher class status and by economic self-interest. She trusts not only his judgement and authority, but she feels compelled by gratitude and deference to obey him, especially because of his title. Of course, she is also influenced to a large extent by her own innocence, vanity and marital aspirations. Flora's own words express many of these complex desires and demands:

So I could not refuse him . . . after being so much obliged to him. . . and he was as agreeable as ever; and so was I, too, I believe . . . At least, he said I was . . . and he's a pretty good judge, I believe, a man of his quality (432)

O, I could not bid him not, you know. I could not be rude to a Knight-Baronet! . . . [H]e brings me prettier things than ever. So I a'n't much a loser. (437-38)

Despite such candid reassurances, Juliet is confident that Flora's hopes of becoming a "Lady" will be dashed and lead to disgrace, especially because she knows how despicable Sir Lyell is. Although she is perceived to be the destroyer of Flora's ambitious prospects when she prevents her seduction, Juliet triumphs by thwarting further class conflict. Juliet also prevents Flora's downfall into prostitution which often resulted in such cases, especially for milliners. Moreover, she preserves the reputation of the shop, as the shopkeeper realizes.

Flora's economic and sexual vulnerability undoubtedly applies to most working-class women in various trades. Juliet also experiences the sexual harassment working-class women would undergo. As I discussed in Chapter One, Juliet becomes prey to many sexual attacks by men both in her employers' households and outside, each incident accentuating her "unprotected" status. One employer's son, Ireton, takes every opportunity to get his hands on her. She is the object of pursuit by aristocratic libertines,

both the sly Sir Lyell and the seemingly harmless Sir Jaspar, and by rural farmers who accost her while she travels on foot. In each case, Juliet escapes unharmed with her virtue intact. Yet, she always expresses regret over this form of women's oppression that made public space dangerous for women.

Significantly, at the moment when Juliet is no longer working, she expresses her most complete empathy and understanding of the working class and her most jarring attack on the wealthy. Toward the end of the novel, when Juliet is driven out of London and forced to wander the countryside, her position most closely resembles prostitution. Awed by the landscape as she reposes from work, she takes in the prospect, "enjoying the quiet and tranquillity of country life" (693). By this time, she has taken on the perspective of the rural laborer, or, in Marxist terms, the alienated worker. She has already seen that the homes of the wealthy do not provide comfort, leisure, or warmth; they are places where the working woman finds physical and sexual exploitation and brutality. Here, in one panoramic gaze, Juliet deconstructs the tradition of pastoral literature. She attacks poets and philosophers for "judging solely by theory" (700), and for handing down a sentimental image of the peasant, shepherd, or cottager as an object of envy. Instead of finding the simple, happy people also promised her by the tradition of sensibility, she discovers people whose lives are only work-lives, without hope and without variation:

The verdure of the flower-motleyed meadow; the variegated foliage of the wood; the fragrance and purity of the air, and the wide spreading beauties of the landscape, charm not the labourer. They charm only the enlightened rambler, or affluent possessor. Those who toil, heed them not. Their eyes are upon their plough; their attention is fixed upon the harvest; their sight follows the pruning hook. If the vivid field catches their view, it is but to present to them the image of the scythe, with which their labour must mow it; if they look at the shady tree, it is only with the foresight of the ax, with

which their strength must fell it; and, while the body pants but for rest,
which of the senses can surrounding scenery, ambient perfumes, or vocal
warblers, enchant or enliven? (701)

Living among rural laborers, Juliet discovers how toilsome, routinized, and oppressive their lives really are, a discovery unimagined by non-workers, city folk, and writers. She contrasts the experiences of “preparers” or producers, to “partakers” or consumers, another particularly Marxist idea. In this way, Juliet seems to be blaming capitalism for the world’s injustices.

During this meditation on laborers’ lives, Juliet realizes that “failure without fault; success without virtue; sickness without relief; oppression in the very face of liberty; labour without sustenance; and suffering without crime . . . all call aloud for resurrection and retribution! that annihilation and injustice would be one! and that Man. . . must necessarily be destined. . . for Immortality” (701-02). On one hand, the language of revolution lies hidden under the mask of spiritual discourse. On the other hand, Juliet’s despair at the sudden realization that human lives suffer many injustices forces her to subscribe to a belief in the next world. Thus, she refuses to accept the pointlessness of these injustices, preferring to find justification and hope in immortality. In her wonderment, she comes to understand that privileged people like Elinor do not believe in immortality because they have not experienced or contemplated these injustices.

Like many members of the working-class, Juliet recognizes that there is little freedom in work. She vehemently contradicts Elinor who holds the “customary” attitude toward workers by telling her:

Choice, Madam! Alas! deprived of all but personal resource, I fixed upon a mode of life that promised me, at least, my mental freedom. I was not then aware how imaginary is the independence, that hangs for support upon the uncertain fruits of daily exertions! Independent, indeed, such situations

may be deemed from the oppressions of power, or the tyrannies of caprice and ill humour; but the difficulty of obtaining employment, the irregularity of pay, the dread of want, —ah! what is freedom but a name (473)

This passage predates Marx's study of workers and the belief, to paraphrase, that workers enjoy only the freedom of unemployment, exploitation and economic injustice. Yet, in another sense, for Juliet, freedom *is* just a name; that is, once she is named, she will gain her freedom. With this freedom will come her liberation from the working classes, of course. But this will come at the very end of the novel, making Juliet spend the entire time of the story among the working classes. Thus, Juliet's identification as, or with, "unprotected" women of the working classes completely transforms her understanding of how human suffering can be justified, how capitalism distances "preparers" from "partakers," and how unstable class identity is for women.

Conclusion

Historically, it has been acknowledged that "the loss of opportunities to earn increased the dominance of marriage as the only survival route for middle-class women . . ." (Davidoff and Hall 273). Clearly, then, women who desired or needed to achieve independence wanted the opportunities available to women expanded. The central figure in the feminist manifestoes for reform is the middle-class woman who is positioned outside of patriarchy. She is the well-educated, unprotected woman left without a fortune. Since, in their argument for female work, the female advocates must conquer their readers' fears that fallen female virtue would result, they demonstrate the impropriety of custom and assure readers that decorum and delicacy will prevail. Consequently, female sexuality once again becomes central to the woman question as it had been throughout the eighteenth century. Though women would be vulnerable to promiscuity in the work place, the greater fear of prostitution is imagined in order to persuade women to develop their domestic roles. The

prostitute reminds women of their limited options. Thus, “it may, indeed, be argued that the concerted attack on any display of female *sexual* independence may have much to do with fears about new opportunities for their *economic* activity” (Davidoff and Hall 275).

It is my contention that middle-class women had a closer affinity to the working class than they wished to admit. These women writers depended upon the model of the working woman to help define their own proposals for the increased support of and sympathy for the unmarried (in)dependent woman and the expansion of her educational and employment opportunities. At the same time they sought to maintain some control over the lives of the working class, they borrowed models of training and appropriate employment situations for their own construction of womanhood. In doing so, they resisted the idealized domestic model and offered new models of womanhood for the middle class. In particular, they developed a social constructionist theory that explained how women were taught, not born, to be dependent, submissive and obedient.

For middle-class women, to work was to transgress the boundaries of sex, to defy the dominant discourse on women's natural roles and to condemn the social constructions of women. Work did not necessarily free women from their gender identity. As I have emphasized, women continued to be defined by their sexual identity and encountered sexual misconduct at work. As independent workers, they were viewed as sexually “free” and available to men. And because they lived in a society that was increasingly influenced by the binary construction of gender, which Mary Poovey theorizes, women were subjected to a bifurcation that divided their choices into either ideal or fallen.

Feminist novelists challenged conservative discourse by portraying fallen heroines with domestic virtues and by demonstrating that expanded opportunities in education and work for middle-class women would save them from prostitution. These novelists daringly depict heroines who desire economic, intellectual, and sexual independence in order to promote their liberal feminist thought.

A closer look at the relationships between our heroines and their domestic servants in the next chapter further illuminates the relationship between middle-class and working-class women. Framing their relationships within the mid-century discourse of prostitution reform, I identify them as “redemptive” friendships in which there are delicate degrees of dependence and interdependence between each. These relationships also demonstrate the ways in which our heroines resisted dominant class attitudes toward the working classes.

CHAPTER FIVE REDEEMING WOMEN: FEMALE FRIENDSHIP

Introduction

I had two mattresses [sic] on my bed; what did I want with two, when such a worthy creature must lie on the ground? My mother would be angry, but I could conceal it till my uncle came down; and then I would tell him all the whole truth, and if he absolved me, heaven would.

I begged the house-maid to come up stairs with me (servants always feel for the distresses of poverty, and so would the rich if they knew what it was). She assisted me to tie up the mattress (133)

In this passage, Maria Venables in Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman, recalls an act of subterfuge when she was a child in which she aided Peggy, her nurse's impoverished sister. During this benevolent activity, Maria identifies with her house-maid as one who understands distress and feels responsible for alleviating it. By doing so, she distances her own identity from the "rich" who are usually insensible to the sufferings of others. Yet, Maria is able to help precisely because of her privileged class status.

In each of the novels under study, the heroine positions herself between classes, identifying with the lower and indicting the upper. In fact, our heroines align themselves with the lower classes, whether through compassion, empathy, or protection, in order to critique customary class attitudes and the class structure, in general. There is not only the promotion of female solidarity between women of these classes, in the financial, emotional and psychic support they offer their servants, but the determined effort to transform social relations much as the early radical tradition supported. The heroines empower their servants and enable them to form a self-identity, to be named, and thus, humanized, to have important roles, and to overcome their silence. Furthermore, throughout each of these

novels, the heroines resist the dominant discourse of class difference and the conventional thinking about the poor or servants as morally corrupt, idle, and insensitive by believing in the redemption of them and forming households with them. This resistance is also accomplished through their practice of benevolence and charity and through their own articulated consciousness in subversive discourse.

Although classic notions of propriety, or legal censorship during wartime restricted their expression, women in the late-eighteenth century still maintained the power of subversive discourse to articulate their resistance to dominant views. Women writers during this period were extremely careful in presenting political ideas. Scholars like Johnson and Poovey argue that women writers buried their unorthodox and unacceptable views under the appearance of propriety¹ with the rational woman standing in sharp contrast to the domestic woman. Yet, considering the position of these women writers who did not publish anonymously, what we know of Wollstonecraft's world, and the meetings at Joseph Johnson's home or Williams's salon in Paris, we can assume that it was fairly common in some circles for women to demonstrate their thinking powers, as we see in these novels. In this chapter, we are concerned with servants and the working-class women who are less likely to voice their thoughts and had less access to dominant discourse.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to uncover the peculiarities of the relationships between our heroines and their domestic servants. Though some scholars are satisfied with dismissing the role of servants or working-class characters, I demonstrate the importance of working-class women to a middle-class woman's sense of herself and to the gender ideology of the women's rights movement. In this chapter, I establish exactly how

¹ Consider the reception of Adeline Mowbray, for example. Because its politics are so ambiguous, the novel was warmly received by both conservatives and radicals alike who interpreted the novel as a warning and as feminist, respectively. Claudia Johnson discusses the subversive techniques of women writers in the first chapter of Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel. Cf. Poovey, The Proper Lady.

integral class identity is to female friendship, female possibility, and alternative political visions. I propose a category of fictional female friendship that makes class identity central to its definition: redemptive friendship.

In the first part of this chapter, I relate a brief history of the treatment of prostitutes in the eighteenth century, and the central role the Magdalen Hospital plays in promoting redemption, in order to frame our understanding of the complex ways in which redemption operates in the novels. Our authors align themselves with progressive thinkers who believed the prostitute and the fallen woman could be redeemed. Their all-female households function as a means for redemption, much like the Magdalen Hospital. Like the Magdalen Hospital, they could reach a limited number of seduced, fallen, or prostitute women. And, like the institution's planners, our heroines aim to assimilate women into society as useful members by bringing them into their households. Yet, while the Hospital could point to a measurable degree of success, our heroines' success remains ambiguous, even unknown at times, because they conclude their novels only with positive suggestions of such reform, not a thorough depiction of social change. In the second part of this chapter, I contextualize our heroines' desire for these friendships within the cult of sensibility. Our heroines employ sensibility for a radical transformation of social relationships that collapses class distinctions and empowers women. Finally, I conclude this dissertation with our novels' portrayal of these relationships, discussing them in chronological order of publication. Because it concludes with marital bliss, Burney's The Wanderer does not appear to belong in this chapter; however, I briefly demonstrate how Juliet's attack on class hierarchy and her relationships with working-class women resembles those of our other heroines. For the most part, I am referring to the four novels.

Redemption: The Magdalen Hospital

As the eighteenth century progressed, attitudes toward prostitutes, female sexuality, and the working classes changed for the better. In the early part of the century, prostitution was the focus of moral reform societies such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners. Private citizens took responsibility for clearing the streets of bawdy-houses and prostitutes. The Society was enormously popular and extensively networked, initiating sweeping campaigns against prostitutes. But its members had little concern for the prostitute herself. She was effectively punished for her crimes and denied her civil rights. In the 1720s, for example, prostitutes were sent to the Bridewells, “prisons that were specially designed for the ‘correction’ of convicted prostitutes” where they were brutally whipped, disfigured, or forced to do hard labor (Roberts 183). Though these moral reform societies lost their popular appeal by the early decades of the eighteenth century, they were responsible for drawing attention to prostitution.

As we have seen, during the 1790s, efforts to control the social mobility of the working classes increased as reformers and authorities attempted to gain political and social stability after the French Revolution. The laws regarding prostitution provide evidence of the measures taken to restrict the working classes. They express heightened concern for moral order by directing their attention to female sexuality and restricting female space. Under the guise of regulating prostitution, reformers and authorities attacked non-conformist practices of the working classes, such as cohabitation. Viewed through the lens of middle-class moralism, women engaged in these practices were now defined as prostitutes. By focusing on the moral containment of working-class women, these laws ignored the severe economic conditions working-class women faced, including job insecurity, sexual exploitation, seasonal employment, and dismissals without warning, making her one of the least protected citizens in English society, as we shall see in the example of Jemima in Mary Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman. Because

prostitution was associated with social disorder, crime, and immorality, female sexuality continued to be under attack as threatening. Controlling prostitution was synonymous with regulating female sexuality and female space.

However, while reformers still wanted to regulate social order through prostitution as they had earlier in the century, their methods had been changing since the middle of the century. They hoped to reform prostitutes and return them to respectable society through work. For example, Sir John Fielding's plan called for the establishment of a public laundry in which the poor women could serve the needs of the middle classes. As historian Nickie Roberts explains: "The further aims of this ideal institution were to instil the housewifely arts like cooking, knitting and cleaning into the minds and hearts of the formerly rebellious and self-willed prostitutes. The long-term goal was their miraculous conversion into submissive and dutiful wives" (185). Redemption was reserved for those who could best conform to the middle-class ideal of domestic womanhood. Yet, because of their class position, these redeemed women were destined to become servants, not wives.

Most importantly, with the establishment of the Magdalen Hospital, a charity organization formed in 1758 as a 'Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes,' middle-class reformers demonstrated that prostitutes could be redeemed and welcomed back into society as useful members.² The Hospital was the first of four large-scale institutions in London that were established during the 1750s, a period of intense concern and debate over prostitution reform. In 1787 the Lock Asylum, in 1807 the London

² For complete histories of the Magdalen House, see Compston, The Magdalen Hospital; Pearce, An Ideal in the Working; Nash, "Prostitution and Charity" and Social Attitudes; Trumbach, ed. Prostitution Reform: Four Documents, "Modern Prostitution and Gender in Fanny Hill", "Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture," and Sex and the Gender Revolution.

Female Penitentiary, and in 1813 the Guardian Society were established for prostitutes.³

Henry Mayhew, writing in the late-nineteenth century, describes the debates: “Even good and actively benevolent men appear to have been startled at the novelty of the proposition, while they doubted the wisdom, and still more the success of such an attempt. The newspapers of that period contained both arguments against, and ridicule of the plan and its promoters” (4: xxxvi). The plan's main thinkers and supporters, magistrates Saunders Welch and John Fielding, and middle-class Evangelical reformers Robert Dingley and Jonas Hanway encountered resistance from the public who voiced their concerns in contemporary periodicals. It was believed that such an institution would encourage prostitution (Browne 144). But most people had come to feel that something had to be done about prostitutes and support grew enormously over the years.

The development of such a hospital documents the shift in attitude away from punishment, which clearly had no long-term effects, to reform and rehabilitation (Nash, Social Attitudes 93). The aims of the plans were to reduce the number of prostitutes on the streets, educate them, and train them for domestic service. Trumbach claims another shift is evident: since contemporaries recognized that they could not eradicate prostitution completely because of men's sexual needs, they sought to change the behavior of prostitutes (“Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity” 197). Trumbach discovered that by mid-century men were no longer arrested along with prostitutes as they had been earlier in the century. Thus, blame was effectively centered on the prostitute. And, benevolent as the charities were, they still focused on the women's responsibility: she had to repent, pray, and act humble. She was the one who suffered insults, lost her reputation, and was scorned.

³ For a discussion of these organizations and how they differed see Nash, Social Attitudes, Ch. 4. For example, the latter two gave the women harsher workloads and allowed women on its governing boards whereas the earlier two avoided any form of punishment and prohibited women's participation. Trumbach also includes a discussion of the Lock Asylum in “Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity.”

The Hospital's planners rejected these conventional responses to former prostitutes. In fact, while many claimed the prostitute's life was hard with little chance of redemption, the Magdalen's success rate demonstrated that society would, indeed, welcome the prostitute. Nash concludes from the Magdalen reports that nearly 70 percent of the 5,558 who stayed there between 1758 and 1829 were either reconciled to their friends and family or placed in service. Others left, were dismissed, became ill or died. A small percentage of them even married. Upon their departure they were given a share of their profits from their handiwork, a certificate of good conduct and some were given a bounty if they intended to marry or to set up trades. Earlier departures depended on an application from a parent, friend, or future employer who had to declare forgiveness and promises to be responsible for the young woman (Pinchbeck 119–121).

Whereas Nash argues that the Magdalen Hospital is a predecessor to penal institutions which served as methods of social control, Trumbach believes the analogy of a convent is more appropriate (Nash, "Prostitution and Charity"). Like nuns, the young women "made promises to reform their lives and stayed until they were prepared to rejoin the world" (Trumbach, "Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity" 198). In contrast, the emphasis laid on the preparation for work makes me think the Hospital had the Schools of Industry in mind, and appears to be more like a "domestic science training centre," as Ivy Pinchbeck would call it (1:118). Moreover, John Fielding established his model as an alternative to the apprenticeship system of the parish workhouse which failed to place young girls in secure positions (Nash, Social Attitudes 216). Nash claims that women who were not prostitutes, but who were seduced, were encouraged to enter and were admitted in large numbers whereas hardened prostitutes were turned away. The planners believed young women were more tractable and better able to be reformed.

Though they could claim some success in the fulfillment of their goals, the reformers were limited in their ability to rid the streets of prostitutes. They could

accommodate only a few of the 20-25 applicants per month. Their task at hand must have been daunting and could only lead to frustration in the face of their failure. Yet, we look back at this period as truly a time of reform, and for that they were successful. They dismissed early eighteenth-century methods of punishment for a benevolent plan of rehabilitation and they garnered sympathy, compassion and financial support for prostitutes.

The central importance of the Magdalen Hospital is its promotion of redemption, an idea that challenged the belief that a woman's sexual conduct could ruin her, even fatally. The planners successively shifted popular opinion away from punishment as a way of dealing with prostitutes to giving them training, education, and employment which were the very same methods feminists felt were necessary for women to achieve independence.

But, the people behind these moral reform movements and institutions failed to address the entrapping double standard which blamed women, not men or society, for prostitution, and made them responsible for their own redemption. Mary Wollstonecraft sums up the contradictions inherent in the double standard when she exclaims: "Asylums and Magdalens are not the proper remedies for these abuses. It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world! (Vindication 165). Wollstonecraft argued for a rehabilitation of society, not women, one that would reform female education, extend opportunities to women, and eradicate gender discrimination. Feminists also believed that until a social system which exploits female labor and makes prostitution a necessity is altered, a prostitute could not be redeemed. Unlike many eighteenth-century writers, the feminists commonly see the prostitute as a product of her society. Mary Ann Radcliffe, for example, argues "that the frailty of female virtue more frequently originates from embarrassed circumstances, than from a depravity of disposition" (the title of Part II in The Female Advocate). Radcliffe supports the need for asylums not only to reclaim the guilty, but to help prevent the ruin of women (442). Because she believes that they need to do more than

heal the body and soul, she demands extensive social change. In her sociological analysis of how environment influences women, she presents case after case history whose common theme is the denial of educational and employment opportunities to women. Most importantly, she shifts blame from women to circumstances out of their control like deaths of parents or spouses, men dominating women's trades, the market, lack of education, and even mercenary marriages. Included in her indictment are the capitalist-controlled markets that create instability in women's work. This focus on social and economic causes for prostitution and women's general subordinate position differentiated feminists from middle-class reformers like the Magdalen Hospital planners.

Redemption for feminists meant a radical revision of society. Feminists appropriated the idea of a prostitute's redemption for the rhetoric of liberal feminism. In a redeemed world, women could freely choose and maintain their independence. While reformers held up the middle-class domestic woman as a model with which to define redemption and to judge rehabilitated prostitutes, and indeed, all women, our feminist novelists imagined a more complex model that looked to both the rebellious woman with domestic virtues and defiant sexuality and the working-class woman. They imagined an interdependent redemption that collapsed class identity. In the novels, redemption becomes the defining theme of interclass women's friendship.

In the novels, there are many ways a middle or upper class woman could identify with and be redeemed by a working-class woman. Working-class women presented a model of personal and sexual autonomy to their middle-class peers. Moreover, there is usually little difference in age between the heroines and their friends. The domestic servant of the late-eighteenth century usually worked between the ages of 15 and 20, until she married which was cause for dismissal. She began work at a young age in order to contribute to her working-class family's income. She also worked in order to save up for marriage or for a future establishment, such as an inn or shop, with her husband. The

heroines of these novels want to achieve this model of independence and autonomy. The outspoken servant contrasts with the passive privileged young woman. With Maria victimized by her husband and forced into an insane asylum, and Adeline similarly abused by an unfeeling husband, the domestic servant appears to have much more freedom than the British wife.

The domestic servant and heroine also identify with each other in their outcast status: they are defined by their sexual behavior and viewed as immoral. Both challenge the “natural” construction of woman by demonstrating the disarming influence of social standards and codes of propriety. As Nina Auerbach informs us, “Women in literature who evade the aegis of men also evade traditional categories of definition” (11). In a restrictive domestic order, women who transgressed the boundaries of class propriety, by working or by resisting customs, were likened to prostitutes. Moreover, because of their economic and sexual vulnerability, the working-class and middle-class woman were threatened with prostitution as a realistic work option, as I argued in Chapter Four.

Redemption: Feminist Novels and the Cult of Sensibility

The identification between the heroines and working-class women also stems from the heroines' value systems in which their actions are guided primarily by the belief in the innate goodness of human beings and the principles of “sensibility.” Sensibility influences both epistemology and moral codes by emphasizing “a reliance upon feelings, as opposed to reason and law, as guides to truth and conduct” (McDowell 10). The heroines embody and follow this tradition of sensibility by being sympathetic to the less fortunate, self-sacrificing, affectionate, and benevolent, but critique sensibility by cultivating their intelligence, independence, and rational thought in both public and domestic spheres.

The cult of sensibility's heyday was between the 1740s and the late-1770s (Todd, Sensibility 9). G. J. Barker-Benfield credits women's novels for its formulation and

dissemination (xix). He views sensibility as “the most ambitious reform movement of the eighteenth century” which targeted both traditional female education and male behavior towards women (xxvi). For that reason, sensibility employed domestic ideology to reform men’s manners. The boundaries between private and public worlds were intensified under sensibility with the family’s home becoming more separated from the individualistic corrupt world, demonstrating “the elevation of social ties and affections--in contrast to the selfish and antisocial values of the world” (Barker-Benfield 218). Thus, proponents of sensibility held “contempt for urban life and the conventions of civilized society, such as its business and legal activities and its aesthetic tastes, and a love for the simplicity of rural life and the solitude and beauty of the countryside” (McDowell 11). But sensibility supported a dangerous withdrawal from the social world.

Sensibility was used by conservatives and radicals alike. Edmund Burke and Hannah More, for example, employ sensibility to uphold the traditional patriarchal political structure. These “conservative” writers also endowed a traditional view of women with sensibility, centering her domestic role within a nuclear family. On the other hand, “radical” writers like Helen Maria Williams embrace sensibility for its vision of hope for social change. Barker-Benfield believes that the “history of sensibility is one of increasingly self-conscious conflict, culminating in the work and reputation of Wollstonecraft” (xxiii). By mid-century it is valued highly and used as criteria for judgement, increasingly associated with women. Even those who attack it find value in it for elevating women’s status.

For some writers, sensibility had equalizing power because it was accessible to people of all social levels. Sensibility attacked class hierarchy “since it evaluated a person not by achievement or breeding but by ability to feel” (Todd, Sensibility 132). However, most writers, especially conservatives like Hannah More, claimed sensibility only for the higher ranks (Todd, Sensibility 12-13). According to Barker-Benfield, “The cultivation of

sensibility could be thoroughly consistent with the maintenance of rigid class hierarchy” (227). When the lower classes are portrayed with sensibility, it is usually in relation to their master, in the context of an anachronistic aristocratic “fantasy” in which familial ties, not a wage contract, still prevail (Todd, Sensibility 13). Or, as Barker-Benfield points out, novelists of this tradition sentimentalize the poor, especially peasants, by associating them with an idyllic pastoral tradition (228), a tendency which Burney distinctly critiqued in The Wanderer when Juliet visits rural farmers in the North and comes to understand the workers’ worldview, as I discussed in Chapter Four. In the novels, the upper classes do not believe the lower classes are capable of sensibility, but our heroines do. Moreover, our heroines are endowed with a more authentic kind of sensibility, as opposed to those who simply borrow its rituals and gestures for show.

By the late-1770s, the first attacks on sensibility by both camps began to appear, though there was precedent in the late-1750s with Frances Greville’s “Ode to Indifference.” Greville “was chief and most famous and probably first of those who publicly repudiated sensibility,” according to Betty Rizzo (244). Rizzo’s publication of the full text of the popular poem from manuscript and her description of Greville’s life establish that in the poem Greville rejects sensibility for limiting women’s lives.⁴ The poem elicited numerous supportive and critical responses including defenses of sensibility by both Hannah More and Helen Maria Williams in the 1790s. By 1800 sensibility gains definitive pejorative associations which are certain by the time Austen publishes Sense and Sensibility in 1811. According to Todd, “By the 1790s almost all serious novelists noted the selfishness, irrationality and amorality of the cult of sensibility” (Sensibility 144). In Vindication of the Rights of Men, Wollstonecraft attacks Edmund Burke’s conservative use of sensibility in his Reflections, associating his rhetorical style with effeminacy. Wollstonecraft also

⁴ In contrast, Janet Todd (Sensibility) interprets Greville’s poem as “an elegant expression of the very quality it decried” (61).

critiqued a female education that produced women of sensibility without reason who were not capable of rearing children properly in Vindication of the Rights of Woman. While Wollstonecraft believed in sensibility, she demanded that it be united with reason, a distinction later identified in the contrast between “sense and sensibility,” which also distinguished the two versions of sensibility: “Wollstonecraft’s distinction was to take “Sense” further in her defense of woman’s mind, and to be still more damning in her analysis of the damage an exaggerated “Sensibility” could do to women” (Barker-Benfield 362). Wollstonecraft believed that the feelings evoked by sensibility could guide, or be guided by, reason.

During the post-revolutionary years, the sensibility that was celebrated for supporting the French Revolution could no longer be blindly accepted without explaining the royal family’s execution, Robespierre’s bloodshed, and general social disorder to which England reacted by suppressing radical activity. Proponents of sensibility had to reformulate their beliefs also because it began to lose its appeal and its self-indulgence seemed ineffective for transforming political structures. For example, while sensibility’s antislavery beliefs could arouse feelings of sympathy for slaves, it could also depoliticize the issue by evading rational thought (Barker-Benfield 225). Radicals remained committed to many of the beliefs of sensibility such as “man’s capacity for the social affections and his ability to feel for objects of distress without distinction of family or rank . . .” (C. Jones 3) and continued to envision equality and human perfectibility in a new society. They now emphasized human agency or active intervention. Chris Jones identifies the power of sensibility for women writers like Williams and Wollstonecraft: “In the name of individual sensibility they qualified and attacked traditional sentimental images which enshrined conservative values just as Godwin attacked traditional institutions in the name of individual reason” (4). But, they needed to find a way to defend their version of sensibility. Radical women had to align their politics of sensibility closer to Godwin’s

rationalism in order to deemphasize sensibility's stress on feeling (C. Jones 4). In classical radical terms, the women writers privilege the rational mind over the bodily passions, suggesting even the ability of the former to regulate the latter. In only a few years, by the late 1790s, the rational mind that the proponents of radical sensibility valorized would be associated with subversion by conservatives and patriots. When Williams constructs her heroine, Julia, with the fortitude to resist the temptation of passion, she enters a tradition, along with Wollstonecraft, of portraying the "rational woman." Masculine privilege, demand and desire are tempered by a rational, female self-control which was clearly a means towards gaining autonomy. According to Anne Mellor, "women writing in England between 1780 and 1830 . . . wrote novels designed to advocate the revolutionary idea that women must think as well as feel, that they must act with prudence, avoid the pitfalls of sexual desire, and learn from their mistakes. In focusing our attention upon a heroine who develops in intellectual and moral stature, these novelists explicitly corrected a tradition of eighteenth-century writing by women . . . called 'the didactic tradition' of 'reformed heroines.' (Romanticism 40).

In some ways I believe that our heroines guide their moral and psychosocial behavior according to the tenets of sensibility, yet in other ways, they follow a more radical version of this tradition which determines their relationships with the less fortunate and their creation of redemptive friendships and female families, a form of sensibility that supports female autonomy. Because these novels were written at a time when sensibility was under attack, we must read them as part of this tradition of critique against the cult of sensibility. In their novels, our novelists blame sensibility for the destructions of irrational passion which we see explicitly in Julia and Emma Courtney. Similarly, Maria's sensibility unites her to a despicable man: she decides upon her future husband, George

Venables, because he performs a single act of charity.⁵ Our novelists also identify the two versions of sensibility and engage in these attacks on sensibility with their portrayal of fashionable women who coopt a version of sensibility to satisfy their own ambitions, pride, vanity, and belief in the status quo. Sensibility becomes the spectacle of carefully choreographed tears and gestures for them, or showy “sentimentalism,” as defined by one scholar, Judith H. McDowell. Thus, our heroines are closer to working-class women who are models of a properly balanced, authentic sensibility. As figures furthest removed from the “world” of commercialism where female education promotes idleness and dissipation in pleasure-seeking, working-class women seem to have a more “natural” sensibility. Our heroines’ relationship with them provide jarring attacks on sensibility, the class attitudes of the wealthy, and their female education.

Each of the four novels under study in this chapter includes a portrayal of cross-classing female friendship and concludes with the formation of all-female households. In the novels under study, the households established by these women are matriarchal. Women become the heads of households they create, but are not simply substituted for the patriarch within the masculine paradigm of power. With the absence of fathers, brothers, and husbands, there is the suggestion that descent will be through the mother’s line for the sons and daughters born to or adopted by heroines in all four novels. Furthermore, this “matrilineality” is assured when both Maria and Adeline write memoirs for their daughters and Emma leaves her memoirs to her son. I use the more precise terms, “matrifocal” and “feminocentric,” to indicate the central importance of women in these families and households.

Though these endings place these novels in the tradition of female utopias, we do

⁵ As Janet Todd points out, Maria later realizes that such displays of benevolence can be deceiving when enacted by calculation. She attributes Maria’s misery to this error in her judgment (Todd, *Women’s Friendship* 215). Similarly deceitful libertines, like Burney’s Sir Lyell, disguised themselves as men of feeling in order to gain the trust of the innocent women they wanted to seduce.

not see a working utopia fully established as we do in Sarah Scott's A Description of Millennium Hall. Instead, the endings offer only a vision and hope of a fulfilling female family. By ending their novels with images of female solidarity and by exposing problems with the institutions of marriage and of the family, these writers envisioned alternatives to the problems facing the single woman and find her a "place." These feminist households have similar aims as the tradition of women's communities, a literary tradition that disturbs "official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfillment" (Auerbach 6). In contrast to the tradition of male bonding, Auerbach informs us, "a community of women may suggest less the honor of fellowship than an antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and biological rewards" (1). Moreover, she notes, "As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone" (5).

Because the endings suggest a future of female-centeredness, they are engaged in the gendered conflict between the socially constructed domestic and public spheres. Barker-Benfield claims, "The extreme polarization between tender sensibility and hard world makes the best sense when one acknowledges its alignment with gender, even though very significant male writers shared the moral vision that criticized the culture of worldly men" (219). Although some feminist scholars, like Eleanor Ty, find these endings reassuring and "exciting," one critic, Roxanne Eberle, questions the implications of these closures: "is this exclusively feminine 'world of obligation' an entirely positive alternative to inherently flawed heterosexual union?" The feminine utopia, she notes, "is a world entirely cut off from the masculine 'public sphere'" (Eberle, "Amelia" 146). Yet, as Auerbach observes, the "fictional reality of women's autonomy [is that] their isolation has had from the first the self-sustaining power to repel or incorporate the male-defined reality that excludes them" (6). Within the tradition of sensibility, women writers divided the

domestic sphere from what they called the “world” in order to reform the latter. This reform aimed to alleviate a woman’s vulnerability to sexual assault by men in the public world. Barker-Benfield explains that “one response to this conflict and to the ‘torrent of an opposing world’ was retreat” (222).

Thus, we can read the formation of all-female families and households, Anne Mellor suggests, as evidence of a “powerful Romantic female literary tradition that openly contested and corrected this domestic ideology in significant ways . . . [and] rejected the public sphere altogether as irredeemably brutal, corrupt, and self-destructive (Romanticism 83). Mellor claims that women writers of the Romantic era inscribed an alternative political ideology that heralded the model of the family for political organization that could engage in the transformation of the public sphere. They imagined and supported, what Rita Felski terms, a “counter public sphere:”

Like the original bourgeois public sphere, the feminist public sphere constitutes a discursive space which defines itself in terms of a common identity; here it is the shared experience of gender-based oppression which provides the mediating factor intended to unite all participants beyond their specific differences . . . The consciousness of membership in an oppressed group engenders a solidarity rooted in collective identity and in theory grants all participants equal status. (166)

Our novelists create a domestic world of women governed by feminocentric values not found in the public sphere: strong familial ties, interdependence, equality, companionship, and support. Mellor theorizes that they “proclaimed the value of rational love, an ethic of care, and gender equality as a challenge both to a domestic ideology that would confine women within the home and to a capitalist laissez-faire system that would set the rights of the individual, free-will or rational choice, and an ethic of justice above the needs of the community as a whole” (Romanticism 84). Older women, such as Mrs. Pemberton and

Mrs. Mowbray in Opie's novel, provide economic support and maternal care. Middle-class women prevent the ruin of less fortunate members of their class and of working-class women, like Adeline's cousin, Miss Woodville or Jemima. Sexually-transgressive women cast out by society, like Rachel or Mary Warner can avoid prostitution with the support of these families. This domestic world unites these women of all classes by their common oppression as women, forming a solidarity that serves the needs of liberal feminist rhetoric. While the contradiction presented by this isolation from the very public sphere to which feminists wanted access is understandable as a means of reform, and the bond between women is empowering, to what degree does it depend upon an erasure of class identity? Liberal feminism appears to benefit middle-class women, not working-class women who have always worked. Must working-class women shed their class identity in order to enter this middle-class domestic sphere? I suggest this solidarity is problematic since these women retain their subordinate class positions.

The heroine's retreat almost always includes a redemptive servant or working-class woman such as Mrs. Meynell in Julia, Rachel in The Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Jemima in The Wrongs of Woman, and Savanna in Adeline Mowbray. These servants appear dependent on their mistresses, or benefactors, for their assimilation into society. Thus, an important aspect of these friendships is the class identity of each woman.

However, the prominence of class identity precludes the use of Janet Todd's taxonomy of women's friendship. In particular, her description of vertical, "social" relationships does not account for vertical class relationships. Instead, Todd bases vertical relationships upon the mother-daughter bond in which an older woman instructs a younger woman, a relationship that is useful only until adulthood is achieved. The younger woman is socialized into codes of propriety, marriage, and womanhood. On the other hand, a woman forming an horizontal relationship may reach out to another out of benevolence, but it is defined by some form of equality, such as status or intellectual attainment. She enables

the other to experience the larger social world beyond that of her family. One certainly influences the other, but does not instruct her directly (Todd, Women's Friendship 249).

"Social" friendship seeks to accommodate women to their social world. It is a "nurturing tie" in which women value, support and sustain each other. The friend does not interfere with the romantic destiny of the heroine, working only to comfort her friend, "performing acts of heroic self-sacrifice" (Todd, Women's Friendship 4). Social friendship enables women to prosper within patriarchal families, though it does not contest the predominant social organization. Todd explains that despite these outcomes, "it remains a female bonding, limiting women's dependence on men and qualifying the feminine role of virtuous passivity" (349).

The closest Todd comes to describing the friendships in these novels is her identification of "political" friendships.⁶ Unlike social friendship, political friendship enables "action against the social system, its institutions or conventions" (4). As Todd suggests, the bonding of oppressed women in Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman could lead more conclusively toward political action than any indulgence in sentimental feeling could imagine. While none of our authors are as explicit about changing English law and social customs as Wollstonecraft is, each takes on the enormous burden of engaging in debate about women's education, social roles, and marital positions in their novels.

Helen Maria Williams's Julia (1790)

Throughout the pages of the novel, Julia, cottagers, poor families, old soldiers, and laborers' families appear. Without a welfare state, these characters must be provided for through the benevolence and charity of others. The theme of benevolence works its way

⁶ Todd acknowledges that her categories sometimes overlap and that novels may depict more than one friendship. Therefore, she discusses the primary friendship in each novel.

through the text, serving as a reminder of the responsibility and duty the members of the wealthier classes have for the poor. The inclusion of the poor, thus, emphasizes class differences. Julia enters cottages and plays a significant role in the lives of the inhabitants as teacher, benefactor, employer, and friend. As a representative of a wealthy class, she devotes her affluence to relieving the distresses of the poor, who are usually women. She provides them with material needs through her generous donations in the form of a single donation, weekly pensions, and in one case, a yearly pension, and through offers of work. In addition, she gives them her friendship, her respect and a caring ear. By having Julia listen to their stories, Williams allows the silenced figures of literature to have a voice. Much like the wandering figures who appear in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, these figures contribute a significant part to dialog. Moreover, they are not only voiced subjects, but personalized through naming. We have the struggles of Hannah and her younger brothers and sisters, of Little Peggy and her family, the inhabitants of some of the nearby cottages. And if not named, they are identified through their personal relationships, like the old soldier who was a close friend to Julia's grandfather or the wife of Mr. Clifford's gardener, both of whom come to Julia for help out of desperation. Though these characters are given a voice, they are still shown to be dependent upon their "benefactors." Williams portrays a society still governed by a paternalistic ethos in which the social order remains intact. There is little that Julia can do to change the system itself, but she vigorously attempts to change the attitudes and assumptions of the privileged classes through her sharp criticisms, antagonistic position and model actions.

Julia's views are in contrast to the attitudes toward the poor which members of her own class hold. For example, while Julia allows sensibility to the poor, her unenlightened friends callously argue that the poor are insensible to comforts. One character exclaims, "I cannot understand what right people have to the indulgence of so much sensibility, who are in poverty. . ." to which another responds, "I recollect, last time I met her at your house,

you happened to say that you wondered, when people were poor, they didn't prefer some honest employment to living in poverty. . . I supposed they found idleness easy enough" (II: 102-103). Julia, with her sharp tongue and 'reproof valiant' disputes these ideas. When one of the matriarchs announces she finds the "airs" of the poor intolerable, Julia responds: ". . . what strikes me as *intolerable*, was your hint about idleness" (II: 103).

The lack of sensibility by the privileged, with regard to the poor, is displayed again and again. The "fashionable" women pass by the poor Mrs. Meynell as she wades through the dirty streets, and fail to offer her a ride in their coach on their way to Julia's. Finding compassion and tolerance for the poor too troublesome, they then ask Julia to refuse Mrs. Meynell admittance. In contrast, Julia places a higher value on Mrs. Meynell's visit to compensate for her difficult walk and welcomes her. Perhaps she influences their behavior, for the fashionable women offer Mrs. Meynell a ride home, though, of course, she must pay the price of her pride. They differentiate themselves from Mrs. Meynell by characterizing her as less sensitive to walking in the bad weather: "there's a great deal in habit: I suppose it would kill either you or me, but Mrs. Meynell is used to it" (II: 109).

In contrast, Julia recognizes sensibility in the cottagers. She favors one young girl, Little Peggy, with whom she identifies, because of her sensibility: "Peggy was endeared to Julia by her kindness to the flies; for she herself felt for every thing that had life, with a degree of sensibility which many would account a foolish weakness" (I:104). Julia embraces tenets of radical sensibility in which people are united by their feelings, rather than by their class status. Certainly, Julia's benevolence and goodwill distinguish her from members of her own class and form the bonds between her and the cottagers. Yet, we are always aware of her privileged position and authority as benefactor or teacher.

The scenes of extreme poverty provide opportunities for reflecting on class differentiation. In one cottage, Julia observes: "it would seem that the precious essence of content can be more easily extracted from the simple materials of the poor, than from the

various preparations of the rich. Its pure and fine spirit rises from a few plain ingredients, brighter and clearer than from that magical cup of dissipation, where the powerful, and the wealthy, with lengthened incantations, pour their costly infusions" (I:219). One cottage family demonstrates class differences in love and marriage. Julia sees their simple lives as more fulfilling than those who are "slaves of the world." Julia distinguishes between the wealthy elite who are "of the world," that is, the distracting world of commerce and self-interest, and who partake of worldly pleasures, and the cottagers and poor who are located outside of this world. This view is informed by a nostalgic pastoral idealization of the poor which, as we have seen in The Wanderer, was a false and dangerous notion. Yet, like Juliet Granville's encounter with the rural laborers, Julia's interaction with the cottagers renders their difficulties real. There is a glimpse of the true struggles of the poor. They are always sensitively portrayed in need, but, also, I must qualify, dependent. Through each acknowledgement of class difference, there is the overriding sense that society operates primarily by economic injustice.

Of all the poor people that Julia aids, no relationship is more significantly developed than her friendship with Mrs. Meynell, born Miss Forbes. Mrs. Meynell's mother was the daughter of a Scotch Lord who was renounced by her family when she married her father's chaplain. Orphaned at age seven and left unprovided for at age 22 by the deaths of her guardians, Miss Forbes is left destitute. She is placed under the Seymour's care, but "determined not to live in a state of dependance [sic]" (II:72). Miss Forbes's class identity becomes further destabilized, especially when she begins looking for a "situation." With an unstable class identity, she is linked to the "unprotected," working-class woman, becoming victim of sexual harassment by her cousin, Mr. Seymour. Thus, taking the advice of the housekeeper, Mrs. Evans, who is telling this story to Julia, Miss Forbes marries Captain Meynell in order to escape from her vulnerable situation. She is relegated to the working class through her marriage to a "brutal," and "vulgar" captain. Their

“lodgings were mean, and such as bespoke extreme penury.” Her choices, like those of most working-class women, remain limited and determined by her sexual predicament.

After learning Mrs. Meynell’s history “Julia’s heart throbbed with indignation at the oppressor, and melted with compassion for the oppressed” (II: 78). Julia’s sympathetic feeling is similar to the way Maria becomes affected by Jemima’s story; both forming bonds with women of different class positions. Julia determines to help protect Mrs. Meynell from further sexual intrigue. Julia’s friendship with Mrs. Meynell is a rebuke to the blatant disregard for the poor woman held by the “fashionable” ladies.

Mrs. Meynell’s friendship with Julia brings her back into the ranks of the privileged. Thus, with the help of the fortune left by her husband after he dies in India, and by making her home with Julia and Charlotte, Mrs. Meynell re-ascends the social scale. The implication that she is returning to a place to which she once belonged resembles the class-crossing situation of Juliet in The Wanderer. The difference, of course, is that Mrs. Meynell is invited to become part of the household of women located at the Clifford mansion. In a sense, she is rescued from a class status that she did not deserve. As a middle-class woman left without a fortune who seeks independence, a character like Mrs. Meynell has been the central focus of this dissertation and of particular concern to the feminists writing in the 1790s with whom their heroines identify. Her situation illustrates the need for improved female education and for greater work opportunities for women. With marriages that fail, parents and guardians who die, our heroines determine to be self-reliant, or turn to other women for support.

We must ask ourselves why so many fathers and husbands die in this novel and why so many characters choose to remain single. Are we to assume naively that in this novel women are to depend upon themselves and each other, rather than upon institutions like that of marriage, law or politics? As one critic observes, “among other things, Julia proposes that love for a man was not the only possible answer in women's lives” (Ty 84).

Friendship between women provides comfort, happiness, and empowering solidarity. Even the patrilineality that Charlotte's son represents is tempered by matriarchy and disrupted by the lack of traditional family patterns. He is given several mothers in Charlotte, Julia and Mrs. Meynell. And this matrifocal household is the most revolutionary facet of Williams's novel.

We may admire Helen Maria Williams for her unconcealed critique of the callousness and selfishness of the wealthy toward the less fortunate. She resists conventional perspectives of the poor as idle and insensible, and insists on the need for charity, compassion, respect, and friendship in behavior toward the poor, suffering, but no longer silent, figures of late-eighteenth century women's fiction.

Mary Hays's The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796)

Unlike the highly visible and articulate workers appearing in Julia, domestic servants are the only members of the working class whom we encounter in Hays's novel, and they have inconsequential roles. There is, however, the exception of one servant, Rachel, who plays a central role in the Montagu household, and will be the focus of this section. In contrast to Julia, Emma rarely ventures out of the small world of her friends and family because she is consumed by her conflicted passions.

On the other hand, like Julia, Emma defies conventional attitudes toward the poor and servants through subversive discourse. During a dinner party discussion, she defends thieves against soldiers because they are "rendered desperate by passion, poverty, or injustice" while the latter are cold-blooded murderers (II: 37). And when one dinner-guest supports the need for more soldiers in the West Indies "to keep the slaves in subordination," because he fears they will become "as insolent as English servants," Emma cannot resist remarking that "this is a land of freedom . . . servants, here, will not submit to be treated like slaves in Jamaica" (II: 40). The guests persist in viewing servants as "low,

ignorant creatures” who do not know what is right and exist only to obey their masters. They are denied even the power of thought: “what have *servants*, or *women* to do with *thinking*?” With her “odd notions,” Emma is situated, thus, as an outsider forced to play the devil’s advocate. She can hardly contain her anger, and lashes out in discourse which, her auditor remarks, is the verbal equivalent of a blow to the face. Before she is completely excluded from the competitive game of male discourse by the custom of separating genders in the household, she notes that men fear competition from women.

Emma Courtney’s actions support her words and nowhere do we see a deeper commitment to ideals of equality and sympathy for the less fortunate than in her relationship with her servant, Rachel. She hires a “simple, modest, and innocent” eighteen-year old girl, Rachel, to help her with the nursery and housekeeping. Though she must dismiss her only a few months later because she fears her husband will seduce her, Rachel reappears in her life later and eventually they form a female family. When Emma discovers her husband with Rachel, she warns him that:

Should you corrupt the innocence of this girl, she is emphatically *ruined*. It is the strong mind only, that, firmly resting on its own powers, can sustain and recover itself amidst the world’s scorn and injustice. The morality of an uncultivated understanding is that of *custom*, not of reason:--break down the feeble barrier, and there is nothing to supply its place--you open the flood-gates of infamy and wretchedness. Who can say where the evil may stop?” (II: 190)

In one sense, Emma ascribes simplicity, the incapacity for reason, and ignorance to Rachel because of her class identity, qualities often attributed to the working class by the dominant classes. In another sense, she recognizes the difficult plight and vulnerable position of the woman worker and tries to protect her from sexual assault. Emma acknowledges the easy slip into prostitution that can occur from such seductions, which, as we have seen, was a

common preconception. It was also commonly believed, as Emma attests, that there was little hope for a prostitute, much less a seduced woman, to be redeemed. Yet, despite public opinion, and in Emma's case, her own beliefs, desperate women were not always prohibited from redemption or regaining a respectable place in society. Charitable institutions such as the Magdalen Hospital unequivocally show that by the mid-eighteenth century women could be rehabilitated and welcomed into society. In this novel, Emma herself enables Rachel to be restored to life and redeemed as a useful member of society, but as her faithful and devoted servant, of course.

Emma's warning to her husband works to no avail. Despite her clandestine location, Rachel is eventually seduced by her former master, Mr. Montagu. When she gets pregnant, her body becomes a painful daily reminder to Mr. Montagu of his transgression. Since an abortion with medical drugs fails, he commits infanticide on the day of delivery. These presumptive attacks on the female body signify attempts to regulate womanhood by the patriarchy. Through redemption, Rachel can recover control over her own body. Rachel's restoration depends upon her balance of sense and sensibility, for she does not suffer from excessive sensibility as does Emma.

Rachel's redemption, however, is dependent upon Emma of whom she asks forgiveness. After her husband's suicide, Emma moves and forms a new family including Rachel as her servant along with her daughter, Emma, and her adopted son, Augustus. With this picture of female unity, it is clear that the normative patriarchal model has been rejected. Emma feels responsible, however noble her ideals, to protect and take care of Rachel. We know Rachel feels gratitude because Emma tells us so in her memoirs, but we do not know firsthand what Rachel thinks of their relationship. Hays comes very close to idealizing and romanticizing the lower classes who, it seems, must always be taken care of. Paradoxically, Emma's maternal capacity redeems her. Her biological role as mother governing her new family fulfills her life and eases her regrets. Though she fails in a

conventional patriarchal family, she succeeds in establishing a strong bond with her adopted son, Augustus, by writing a memoir to provide him with the lessons of her life.

Mary Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs Of Woman. Or: Maria (1798)

The Wrongs of Woman is credited with the distinction by one historian, Khalid Kishtainy, of being one of the earliest novels to focus on the relationship of poverty and prostitution. Similarly, I credit it with being the only novel under discussion which devotes more than a passing reference to or brief portrait of a working-class woman. While the novel centers on the distresses of a married woman of property, Maria Venables, her attendant at the asylum, Jemima, figures prominently in the novel. The interdependence of their relationship distinguishes it from the other friendships between women of different classes that we have seen in Williams's and Hays's novels. Maria depends upon Jemima for a model of the single, independent life, and in a materialistic sense, for her own comforts in prison, and ultimately, for her escape. Jemima needs Maria to restore her to humanity, providing friendship and legitimacy for her assimilation into society. Thus, like Rachel in The Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Jemima's redemption is dependent upon the middle-class heroine.

Jemima's redemption from prostitution began when she started legitimate work as an asylum attendant for £40 a year. However, her meeting with Maria initiates her toward a reconciliation with the society from which she has withdrawn. At first the misanthropic Jemima distrusts Maria. Once she realizes that Maria treats her as a fellow-creature and feelings of sympathy grow between them, she feels secure enough to tell her life story. Maria forms a friendship with Jemima because of the bond they share as oppressed women and because she can improve her conditions in the asylum, find her daughter, and even help her escape. Though Jemima is in a more powerful position, their relationship is one of equality. Janet Todd claims that in this story, "The monologue technique eases equal

friendship It ensures that friendship will flourish” (*Women’s Friendship* 208).

Jemima leaves this job and the financial stability it brings to begin a new life with Maria. Through Maria's friendship, Jemima becomes reestablished in society, the same society which had spurned her.

Jemima enables Maria to understand the power of systematic oppression among women. Jemima’s story transforms Maria’s world-view:

Active as love was in the heart of Maria, the story she had just heard made her thoughts take a wider range . . . Thinking of Jemima’s peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of women, and to lament that she had given birth to a daughter. Sleep fled from her eyelids, while she dwelt on the wretchedness of unprotected infancy, till sympathy with Jemima changed to agony, when it seemed probable that her own babe might even now be in the very state she so forcibly described. (120)

Maria extends Jemima’s oppression to her own daughter and suddenly realizes the centrality of gender, regretting that she had a daughter. With Jemima’s tale in mind, she redoubles her efforts to find her daughter and is enabled to tell her tale of oppression. Jemima literally gives her a voice by providing her with paper and pen to write her memoirs, and by telling her story first.

Although Wollstonecraft left this novel unfinished, the direction the story seems to take in the various fragments and notes for endings she left indicate a continuity of Jemima's and Maria's friendship. Yet, Jemima insists at first “on being considered as her house-keeper, and to receive the customary stipend,” despite Maria's belief in equality. Jemima feels “On no other terms would she remain with her friend” (191). Maria seems to accept these terms because the next and last reference to Jemima is as the “faithful” Jemima (191). It is not clear how content Jemima is with her subordinate status since she mentions earlier that she despises domestic servitude. Ironically, Jemima virtually disappears from

the text after it is established that she will remain with Maria as her servant. Janet Todd ascribes Jemima's refusal to be considered an equal to "her understanding that the infatuated Maria can have no equal friend" because her relationship with Darnford takes precedence (Women's Friendship 224). Thus, Jemima recedes into the background just as Maria's infatuation with Darnford begins. Janet Todd dismisses Maria's choice as the failure to fulfill women's friendship: "in choosing the romantic figment, Darnford, she is following again her own misdirection and female conditioning" (217). Women are prevented from bonding because they are "degraded by their misery" (217). In attributing Maria's stunted psychosocial growth to the failure of her upbringing, Wollstonecraft introduces the need for a radical reform of social custom and female education. By rejecting Jemima, Maria forestalls the formation of a female family that could liberate her. Resisting Jemima's influence and what she has to offer from her life experience, Maria fashions a diminutive role for her rather than opting for establishing true egalitarian friendship.

From the fragments Godwin collected, it seems that Wollstonecraft wanted to focus the remainder of the novel on Maria's personal life by having her undergo the experiences of an adultery trial, a separation from her husband, and a relationship with Darnford. Moreover, Maria deals with intense physical and psychological disorders. Wollstonecraft had planned for Maria a second pregnancy, a miscarriage, and a recovery from a suicide attempt. Nowhere is Jemima mentioned in any of these notes. She seems to be relegated to a minor role, only as a part of Maria's life, and ends up a silenced figure from the working class.

Thus, it appears that society would not welcome a reformed prostitute entirely, unless she was situated in servitude. Maria enables Jemima to achieve precisely what the Magdalen Hospital aimed to do with its rehabilitated prostitutes and seduced women by finding them positions in domestic service, one of only three options which included

marriage, and reconciliation with family. While Maria and Jemima may not have equal status once they are reconnected with the social world, they are equally oppressed and outcast for their sexual activity. Maria recognizes that “all women, rich and poor, have been forced to view their sexuality as a commodity” (Todd, Women’s Friendship 216). Maria would be considered a prostitute by many for cohabitating with a man and for her disregard of marriage customs and divorce laws. She calls Darnford, the man she met at the asylum, her “husband” and lives with him before she settles her separation from her legal husband. As Todd points out, Maria “the middle-class woman, with indulged sensibility and satisfied material needs, can alone have such longings” (Women’s Friendship 222). Jemima, taught to view sex as a commodity, prioritizes self-preservation over her sexual desires. Thus, we can attribute their different attitudes toward sexuality to their class differences.

Jemima's limited role may simply reflect her own expectations. Perhaps her reconciliation with society through Maria's friendship is sufficient for Jemima who ends up with the acceptance and love she never had her entire life. Or, just as likely, she may embrace constructed notions of her own unworthiness. She is told her faults are attributed to the “wicked disposition . . . inherited from [her] mother” and that she was “born a strumpet; it ran in [her] blood” (104; 108). Similarly, in the eighteenth century, illegitimate children were harshly denied a place in orphanages because of the reasoning that “children begotten in sin would naturally inherit their parents' weakness” and contaminate others (Pinchbeck 2: 584). Moreover, the myth that fallen women were predisposed from birth prevailed in this century (Kishtainy 116). It is not until she shares her painful history with Maria that she can move towards a self-identity and reject the monstrous identity she was forced to believe in. Suffering from and formed by the brute prejudices of society, Jemima resembles Victor Frankenstein's creature to a remarkable degree. Untolerated by society, they isolate themselves, living in self-hatred and growing misanthropy, yet both want

redemption. Jemima achieves the reestablished faith in humanity that the creature desires but is denied when Frankenstein refuses to make him a companion. Maria's friendship enables Jemima to regain her humanity.

Indeed, the last fragment that appears at the end suggests that Maria, reunited with her daughter, forms a female family with Jemima, who has suddenly reappeared in the text. We can assume Jemima's and Maria's friendship progresses so that "We can expect that Jemima, who has saved Maria and rescued her child, will now accept the equality she once rejected . . ." (Todd, Women's Friendship 226). It is not until Darnford proves unworthy that these women can reunite. This explicit rejection of male friendship makes their association resemble a lesbian utopia. Jemima's role may seem small and subordinate to Maria's, but we must remember the effect of her narrative. She reminds Maria of her story when she presents Maria's daughter to her while she is in the throes of suicide: "would you leave her alone in the world to endure what I have endured?" (203). The child provides her with the will to live, the affirming last words we have from Wollstonecraft's fragments. In this restoration, with the maternal principle dominating, there is hope that these women will live happily together and foster matrilineal descent--if we choose this ending.

Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray; Or, the Mother and Daughter (1805)

Through Adeline Mowbray, a young, privileged woman, Opie promotes self-sacrifice, benevolence and charity as the ideals of sensibility. Like the heroines of Williams, Hays, and Wollstonecraft, Adeline consciously reminds us of class differences and the responsibilities of the wealthy toward the poor. She acknowledges the differences in size and comfort between the mansions she lives in and the nearby cottages: "The extreme of poverty in the cottage did not disgrace, on the Mowbray estate, the well-furnished mansion-house; [because] Adeline . . . was allowed to draw on her mother for money sufficient to prevent [in]dustrious labour from knowing the distresses of want" (I:

158). Cottagers, then, have relatively minor roles, usually as objects of pathos. Thus, though they are acknowledged as victims of a unequal capitalistic system, there is no challenge to this system.

Like Emma Courtney's attenuated world, the world of this novel is quite small and private. Servants have fairly large roles and are always named, as they are personally involved in these domestic worlds providing consolation, friendship, advice, and emotional support to Adeline,. Servants, like Evans, Adeline's maid when she lives at home, and Arthur, Glenmurray's servant, play important roles. One servant, Mary Warner, becomes Adeline's arch-enemy and wreaks havoc throughout Adeline's life. And Savanna becomes her most faithful and devoted servant in whose arms she dies.

While animosity characterizes Adeline's and Mary Warner's relationship, Adeline and Savanna are bonded by sympathy and friendship, Opie comes close to Wollstonecraft's realism at depicting the life of a working-class woman in her portrayal of the West Indian mulatto woman, Savanna, and her family. Adeline meets this family while they are being dragged through the streets to prison for not paying debts. Medical bills consumed their money and their landlord, who holds a grudge, demands partial payment. Adeline witnesses, along with a large crowd of people, the father, William, who is too sick too walk, hang pathetically on to the weak Savanna. She turns away, intent on fulfilling her promise of buying a very expensive pineapple for Glenmurray. Yet, she is pulled back to the scene by the callousness of the creditor who exclaims, "Why, bring him along, and have done with it; here is a fuss to make indeed about that idle dog, and that ugly black b--h!" These words are too painful for Opie to even write. But, Adeline hears these words and is reminded that the woman was mulatto "and this speech, reflecting so brutally on her colour,--a circumstance which made her an object of greater interest to Adeline,--urged her to step forward to their joint relief with an almost irresistible impulse; especially when another man reproached the fellow for his brutality, and added, that he knew them both to

be hard-working, deserving persons" (II:157-58). Roxanne Eberle notes that "Adeline's identification with Savanna is so intense that she fails to note that Savanna is black until the crowd's deprecating remarks draw her attention to it" ("Adeline" 142). Soon after Adeline saves them by paying their debt with the pineapple money, Savanna's family's luck changes. William gets well and finds work in the West Indies. And Savanna, indebted to Adeline for saving her husband from the debtor's prison by sacrificing her own lover's needs, offers her service, becoming Adeline's loyal guard, protector, nurse, friend, and mother-figure. Like the devoted servants, Rachel and Jemima, Savanna develops a faithful relationship to her mistress that exceeds normal expectations of servants. Savanna protects Adeline from her own husband, Berrendale. She buys Adeline food when Berrendale demands a more economical household. And when Berrendale leaves Adeline to return to the West Indies, the home of his first wife and child, Savanna's "watchful eye" discovers his deceit and betrayal. When a former suitor renews his interest in Adeline, Savanna acts as a mother, encouraging the match and planning the wedding.

For Adeline, family and marriage do not promise the protection and emotional fulfillment that a friendship with another woman provides. Adeline was abandoned by her mother when she remarried and though they attempt to regain contact, her mother does not return to her life until it is too late and Adeline is dying. With Glenmurray's death and Berrendale's failure as a husband, Adeline finds true mothering and friendship in Savanna. Thus, this bond between two women illustrates one of the alternatives to men and marriage. Though we must acknowledge the differences in their class status and race, the two are on fairly equal terms.

I use "fairly" because I do not want to gloss over their real differences. One cannot speak of Savanna without remembering her relationship to the system of slavery. Opie certainly acknowledged this relationship in the West Indies plot. When Savanna visits her dying husband in Jamaica, she becomes a threat to the security of Berrendale who is about

to marry a wealthy heiress. Berrendale has Savanna returned to her original owner from whom she had escaped to England with her husband. Thus, Savanna has always been an enslaved woman, the property of others. When she returns to Adeline in England, once more she is an escaped slave.

When I refer to their “equal” terms, I am referring to their interdependent relationship and the love they have for each other. Adeline does not view Savanna as she does hired help: “Hers was the service of the heart” (II: 204). Adeline places her employer relationship to Savanna outside of the patriarchal capitalist exchange; Savanna works for the love that unites them, not for wages. Adeline does not make the common eighteenth-century distinction among aristocrats between their “little” and “great” families.⁷ And, we hardly see Savanna perform any domestic duties. Adeline is greatly attached to Savanna, yet she is not dependent on her services, but her friendship. When Berrendale asks for Savanna's dismissal, Adeline tells him, “if she leaves me, what will become of me! I shall lose the only person now in the world, perhaps, who loves me with sincere and faithful affection!” (III: 66). And when Savanna actually leaves for Jamaica, Adeline “felt alone in the universe,—nor had she a single female friend to whom she could turn for relief or consolation” (III: 88).

In many ways, feminists have historically used the metaphor of slavery to describe the condition of white women, especially in marriage. Opie also establishes the connection between the (in)dependent woman and the female slave in her novel. Just as Savanna has escaped her subjection, Adeline feels a powerful sense of “liberty and independence” on the morning of Berrendale's departure for Jamaica. Marriage as slavery is also a metaphor used early in Wollstonecraft's classic feminist text, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. As Eberle concludes, “Savanna and Adeline are linked because they challenge conventional

⁷ According to Randolph Trumbach, the “little” family was limited to parents and their children, while the “great” family extended to include servants (*Rise* 129).

prescriptions of how a proper British woman should look and behave; they are both persecuted by an ignorant populace which does not recognize their true virtue . . . Opie suggests . . . that the escaped black slave can serve as an empowering model for the psychologically shackled white British woman” (“Adeline” 142).

Like the endings of the other novels, this novel concludes with the creation of a female family. Adeline's household includes Savanna, the West Indian servant, and her mother's home is also female-centered with the inclusion of Miss Woodville, Mrs. Mowbray's niece, and the close friendship between Mrs. Mowbray and the Quaker, Mrs. Pemberton. Both homes are united during Adeline's dying moments. And, when she leaves her daughter to her mother, we witness matrilineality. The daughter will grow up in a world of female self-sufficiency provided by the Mowbray fortune.

A Note on Frances Burney's The Wanderer (1814)

As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, Juliet Granville gains work experience that aligns her with workers in the conflicts between classes. She witnesses the selfish, unfeeling, petty practices of the upper classes toward the lower. And she has the opportunity to protect working-class women like Flora Pierson from sexual assault by aristocratic libertines. Like our heroines, she empathizes with women of the lower classes and forms redemptive friendships with them. The subject of this section is Juliet's period of wandering when she leaves London to escape pursuit by her French husband in the last part of the novel during which she befriends women of the rural laboring classes. While Juliet's experiences resemble our heroines' retreats with their domestic servants, Juliet does not possess a home in which she invites others. Instead, she truly depends upon working-class women for survival.

As a wanderer, Juliet's marginal social position as a woman is emphasized. Once again, her class identity is difficult to guess. As an unaccompanied woman carrying her

own parcel, she has much trouble finding lodging for she is immediately rendered suspicious:

In the smaller shops, and by the meaner and poorer sort of people, her carrying her parcel herself, levelled her, instantly, to their own rank; while her demand of assistance, her loneliness and even her loveliness, sunk her far beneath it, in their opinion; and, almost with one accord, they bluntly told her that she might find lodging at an inn. (656)

At this significant point of desperation, she is “redeemed” by friendly women of the lower classes, farmers, peasants, cottagers, weavers, who provide her with peaceful asylums from her worries, comforts, rest, friendship, and aid. These women treat her as an equal as Juliet wears nothing that reveals her rank. Moreover, as Juliet notes, “the good women, often lonely travellers themselves, saw nothing in such a situation to excite distrust; and regarded it therefore simply as a claim upon hospitality” (660). In some cases, Juliet offers them help, taking care of Dame Margery Fairfield’s children, for example, or offers a few shillings. But for the most part, she is entirely at their disposal and must accept whatever they can give her for food and lodging. In contrast, when Juliet supplicates men for water, she is quite frightened: one demands a kiss, another demands more. She resolves to restrict her requests to women. Walking alone on the road, she is subject to further sexual harassment: “she had severely experienced how little fitted to the female character, to female safety, and female propriety, was this hazardous plan of lonely wandering” (671). After finding temporary refuge with a weaver’s family, she dangerously encounters young men in the forest who harass her before leading her to their father’s farm where Juliet befriends the daughters. Her rustic journey concludes with her arrival at her destination in New Forest reuniting with Dame Margery Fairfield and her family, but even this happiness is transitory as her pursuers catch up with her. A final escape to the next town leads to her capture by her husband in the presence of Harleigh who finally learns of her identity. But

in a final melodramatic twist, as the Frenchman is about to take Juliet to Lord Denmeath for her portion, he is put under arrest and Juliet is taken to safety.

During this period of wandering, Juliet's views of gender and class are transformed. She comes to understand the differences between upper and lower class women, such as the latter's greatly mobility, greater vulnerability to rape, and heavier burdens and obligations to family. She also gains the Marxist view of the alienated worker, as I discussed in Chapter Four. Juliet's wandering draws attention to all women's oppression and to the unstable boundaries between classes, and supports the remedies of liberal feminism with its demands for expanding women's opportunities.

Conclusion

This final chapter traced the culminating way in which heroines enacted a bold resistance to patriarchy. Dissenting from their culture's strict class hierarchy, they created symbiotic friendships and holistic households with their domestic servants. From their childhood through their adulthood, our heroines defied customary gender roles and created visionary roles for women. They discovered their desires for independence when situated outside of the patriarchal family and marriage. Our heroines rejected traditional mercenary marriages, recognizing their destructive capabilities and accepted only companionate unions, heterosexual relationships based upon intimate friendship, love, and loyalty that valorize domesticity. Our heroines created such unions on their own terms and tried to avoid financial dependence on their fiances. Thus, they embarked on journeys to find ways to earn incomes, other than prostitution and domestic servitude, only to discover that the world offered them few opportunities as middle-class women. In this way, each novel contributes to the radical feminist discourse of the 1790s that questioned the limitations on female space, sexuality, and possibility imposed by an increasingly strict gender ideology. With these heroines who transgress boundaries of femininity by being educated,

intellectual, sexually active, and morally responsible, each author daringly asserts the importance of women's rights.

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