

**The Female Aesthetic Subject: Questions of Taste, Sublimity and Beauty in  
Women's Prose, 1778 to 1828, with Particular Reference to the Works of Clara  
Reeve, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Elizabeth Hamilton and Jane Porter.**

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## **Abstract**

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### **The Female Aesthetic Subject: Questions of Taste, Sublimity and Beauty in Women's Prose, 1778 to 1828, with Particular Reference to the Works of Clara Reeve, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Elizabeth Hamilton and Jane Porter.**

Examining a broad range range of their works, this thesis shows that Clara Reeve, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Elizabeth Hamilton and Jane Porter investigate questions of taste and definitions of the sublime and the beautiful in order both to enhance their own status as critics and to comment on political life. The introduction provides a context for the thesis, exploring trends in the aesthetic thought of the period, particularly as they concerned women writers. The first chapter then shows how Reeve, reflecting her Old Whiggish upbringing, used romance to emphasise the importance of morality to the country. In doing so, she allotted women a wider socio-political function. Her use of the roles offered by romance and romance criticism was essential to this. Reeve's later work explored the application of romance and its aesthetics to bourgeois readers.

Chapter II shows how the uncertain political status of the romance was interrogated by the Lees. Suspicious of the construction of literary and historical authority and of aesthetic disinterestedness, the Lees revealed the way in which such narratives elided certain voices from the culture. They scrutinised the beautiful and examined how public narratives pressure the individual into the sublime of terror.

Partly due to Mary Wollstonecraft's treatment of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), during the 1790s romance was connected by radicals with prejudice or corrupt subservience. For conservative thinkers it was associated with sceptical philosophy and political ruin. Chapter III explores how Elizabeth Hamilton distanced herself from sceptical "metaphysicks" and emphasised her hostility both to romance and to the associated models of chivalry, metamorphic beauty and terror. Nevertheless, she exploited both associationist thought and Scottish common sense philosophy to redefine the sublime and the beautiful, promoting an unusually democratic version of taste.

As shown in Chapter IV, Porter rehabilitated metamorphic beauty. She developed an enclosed, feminine, patriotic sublime which could be used in the context of the everyday. Porter, whose work has been misinterpreted due to her association with Walter Scott, increasingly exploited folk traditions to create a sense of an enduring national identity.

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## **Editorial Note**

The MLA style guide has been followed in this thesis, with certain modifications. In particular, fuller publication details (including names of publishers) have been given for publications issued before 1900.

On the first reference to a text full bibliographic details are given in a corresponding footnote. Further page references to the work are given in the text, in parenthesis with the author's name, or, if more than one work by the particular author is referred to, an abbreviated version of the title which will have been indicated in the initial referencing footnote. In cases where an abbreviated title is used for referencing within the text, but the author's name is not obvious, both author's name and abbreviated title are given.

## Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore an uneasy conjunction frequently noted in modern criticism of eighteenth-century women's writing: the conjunction between standard aesthetic judgments and a non-standard - sometimes muted, sometimes defiant, sometimes troubled - insistence on the female observer. In her 1797 essay "On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature" Mary Wollstonecraft comments:

A taste for rural scenes, in the present state of society, appears to be very often an artificial sentiment, rather inspired by poetry and romances, than a real perception of the beauties of nature. But, as it is reckoned a proof of refined taste to praise the calm pleasures which the country affords, the theme is never exhausted. Yet it may be made a question, whether this romantic kind of declamation, has much effect on the conduct of those, who leave, for a season, the crowded cities in which they were bred.

[. . .] I have 'brushed the dew away' in the morning; but, pacing over the printless grass, I have wondered that, in such delightful situations, the sun was allowed to rise in solitary majesty, whilst my eyes alone hailed its beautifying beams. The webs of the evening have still been spread across the hedged path, unless some labouring man, trudging to work, disturbed the fairy structure; yet, in spite of this supineness, when I joined the social circle, every tongue rang changes on the pleasures of the country.

Wollstonecraft displays a common eighteenth-century literary fascination with genius and originality. Her location of the most "natural" (and by implication, best)

poetry in the “infancy of society” reflects the period’s primitivistic discourse.<sup>1</sup> In short, her words, as one might expect, are coloured by the intellectual and aesthetic concepts of her time. What is more unusual is her trenchant positioning of herself as the arbiter of taste. Other writers on aesthetics of course assumed similar positions of authority but generally they did so more subtly or urbanely.<sup>2</sup> Wollstonecraft, in contrast, is quite blunt. Her forthright use of “I” places her as the sole person with genuine taste amongst a group of supposedly discerning individuals. Wollstonecraft is prepared to see for herself; her vision is unmediated by cultural products, as “printless” as the grass she walks upon. Her emphasis in this essay on the importance of seeing for oneself signals that her aesthetic is politically charged. Her community of late sleepers consists, by implication, of those vitiated in body and mind, mentally vacant and morally lax. Participants in the kind of country-house society Wollstonecraft had experienced when governess in the family of Lady Kingsborough, these dedicated followers of fashion are reminders of the tyrant/slave morality Wollstonecraft attacks in her political writings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1989) 7:7; subsequently *Works*. As Todd and Butler note, the essay “On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature” was first published in the *Monthly Magazine* (April 1797): 279 – 82, and thereafter was placed by Godwin in the 1798 *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, vol. iv (Wollstonecraft, *Works* 7: 4). Todd and Butler have used the text from the latter.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1759), ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); subsequently *Enquiry*. In the “Introduction on Taste,” prefixed to the 1759 second edition of the *Enquiry* Burke notes it is necessary first to establish that taste has “fixed principles [. . .] as it must be judged an useless, if not an absurd undertaking, to lay down rules for caprice, and to set up for a legislator of whims and fancies” (12). Burke supposes that the enquiry will lead him to be a “legislator,” yet at the same moment minimises the impression of the amount of authority he is assuming.

<sup>3</sup>See Mary Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings: A Vindication of the Rights of Men: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (Oxford: World’s Classics-Oxford UP, 1994); subsequently *Political Writings*. Her preference for aesthetic experiences stimulated by nature rather than by art parallels the independence she believes necessary to “break the ignoble chain” of implicit submission to authority in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and it is intimately linked to her vision of women as rational creatures (*Political Writings* 12). However, in her study *Mary Wollstonecraft: Writer* (London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994) Harriet Devine Jump argues that Wollstonecraft’s position in the essay is “in direct contradiction to the view expressed elsewhere in Wollstonecraft’s work: that mankind is constantly moving in the direction of greater perfection. Both the poet’s imagination and the reader’s response are seen as being eroded by the advances of civilisation” (151). Nevertheless, while Wollstonecraft is suspicious of the moral laxity connected with civilisation (and fashionable society), her emphasis on mental independence is consistent with the rest of her work. Jump also makes

Placed in the context of a discussion of nature and poetry, Wollstonecraft's thought appears less threatening than it might in a political or polemical forum. However, that comments made even in such a forum were likely to be highly, if discreetly, contested, a glance at *Mansfield Park* (1814) suggests.<sup>4</sup> That the solitary morning strolls and aesthetic judgments of Wollstonecraft might after all appear rebellious is indicated by revisiting Fanny Price's walk in the shrubberies of her home. Fanny's walk is in the protective environment of the park, in daytime and on gravel at the advice of Sir Thomas who recommends it "as the driest place" (*Novels* 3: 323). Furthermore, it is a walk taken for health and refreshment rather than for any more esoteric purpose - and the result of such startling independence? Mrs Norris finds leisure to comment:

Fanny likes to go her own way to work, she does not like to be dictated to; she takes her own independent walk whenever she can; she certainly has a little spirit of secrecy, and independence, and nonsense, about her, which I would advise her to get the better of . . . (*Novels* 3: 323).

Though Mrs Norris is narrow-minded and ill-judging, her comments on Fanny Price's walk still suggest the potential criticism women could face in their attempts towards independence.

However, Wollstonecraft's essay demonstrates that an approach to more contentious issues could be made during discussions about taste. In "On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature" she supplies an example of how the aesthetic can naturalise ideology by setting observing and thinking for oneself in no more revolutionary a context than that of brushing away the morning dew. In fact, the aesthetic provided a potential space in which other, less polemical writers than Wollstonecraft could explore political significance, and it did this not just in the 1790s but also, as will be shown, in the more conservative aftermath of Wollstonecraft's death. There was, it is true, a gender bias in the discourse of

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some interesting comments on "Hints (Chiefly Designed to Have Been Incorporated in the Second Part of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman)" (1798) in the chapter; see 146 - 54.

aesthetics which, as will be examined, women writers had to negotiate. Nonetheless, female involvement was far more acceptable in the area of taste than in other areas. Thus discussions of the sublime and the beautiful, literary genius and the standard of taste provided women writers with a place to debate not only gender identity, but their role in the nation.

According to Eagleton, the aesthetic has “a certain indeterminacy of definition which allows it to figure in a varied span of preoccupations: freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination, autonomy, particularity and universality, along with several others.”<sup>5</sup> Such indeterminacy of definition is exploited to the full by the writers considered here. This study discusses how the aesthetic offered a space for these writers to debate contentious topics and so is not concerned, except incidentally, with evaluating the coherence of the writers’ accounts and theorisations of such experiences. Instead, it sets out to explore both the marginally canonical and the less well-known prose writings of Clara Reeve, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Elizabeth Hamilton and Jane Porter to gain a fuller sense of their relation to contemporary aesthetic debates. Consisting of a substantial investigation into their work, it will examine how they explored matters of taste and textual authority in order to challenge certain gendered associations. It will show how, in the process, they explore the constructed nature of literary history and even history itself. The second half of the study will demonstrate that Hamilton and Porter offer re-formulations of the sublime and the beautiful in which even slight differences in presentation can be politically significant. It explores the ways in which they questioned the consequences for the nation of the suppression of texts and the elision of voices.

A canon based on too few or the wrong voices concerns Reeve, the Lees and Porter; Hamilton is dismayed by a nation where the people are disadvantaged by the aesthetic values that they hold. Therefore these writers explore the ways in

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 5 vols (London: Oxford UP, 1932 - 1934), see esp. 3; subsequently *Novels*.

which literary or aesthetic prestige is generated, and they ask who is able to make judgments of taste, and on what grounds. In the process they question the authority of literary tradition. Wollstonecraft's brief essay gives a clear example of their preoccupations. It demonstrates a typical concern about the relation of originality to literary tradition, a concern particularly pertinent to women writers because of their equivocal position to that tradition. It also hints at the political dimension of this concern. The essay occupies an extreme position, however, because it attaches so much significance to firsthand vision that tradition necessarily becomes a subsidiary way of deciding literary value. Wollstonecraft suggests that (talented) people should not look to cultural products for their aesthetic experiences. Rather than sifting second hand data, they should prize their own sensations. This necessarily means that those who regard the authority given by tradition as a signifier of or guide to aesthetic value have even less taste than those who experience beauty only through books. To a reader with pretensions to taste Wollstonecraft's *Essay* makes reliance on a series of high status texts or guidance by a national canon seem an unattractive option.<sup>6</sup> Her endorsement of originality over tradition as an indicator of literary value is unusual, particularly for a woman writer. Its peculiarity is partly a result of its links with revolutionary feminism and partly because gender bias made originality and genius harder for women to claim.<sup>7</sup> The women writers examined here, in contrast, do not reject literary tradition but

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<sup>5</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Wollstonecraft moves from admiring the freshness of the ancients' artistic vision to suggesting the damaging effects of imitation. She then proposes that "the reason why most people are more interested by a scene described by a poet, than by a view of nature, probably arises from the want of a lively imagination" (*Works* 7: 10). However, Wollstonecraft does not set up a direct opposition between poetry as artificial and landscape as natural. Rather, her emphasis is on the ability to see (and presumably to describe) for oneself. Her opening remarks indicate a belief that for many landscape appreciation had become a mere fashionable pose and they indicate the extent to which landscape appreciation had been aestheticised by theorists of the picturesque such as Gilpin. Even her use of the word "view" is suggestive since it was commonly used in books of engravings as part of a title. For a further discussion of the aestheticisation of landscape, see Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, eds. *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); subsequently Copley and Garside. In particular, see Ann Bermingham, "The Picturesque and Ready-to-Wear Femininity" (Copley and Garside 81 - 119) which notes the apparatus needed for viewing the landscape in the correct picturesque fashion (87).

adopt more complex compromises. They question and adjust the gender-weighting of the language of taste, sublimity and beauty in order to respond to the notions of national literary history that were being constructed during the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Their work has, however, received relatively little attention. The introduction examines this gap in current scholarship and evaluates the critical influences upon this study. It then explores the aesthetic background against which Reeve, the Lees, Hamilton and Porter wrote, before going on to discuss the writers more specifically.

First, however, there is a question of terminology to clarify. None of the writers considered here uses the term “aesthetics.” “Aesthetic” appeared in English in the nineteenth century; in 1821 Coleridge complained that he could not find a more familiar word for “works of taste and criticism.”<sup>9</sup> In this study it is used as a convenient way to refer to commentary on taste and its standard, on the sublime and the beautiful and on canonicity. It is used to refer to writers’ responses to both the natural and the artificial. This is particularly necessary because when these writers consider, for example, the sublime, their experiences frequently relate to the

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<sup>7</sup>For the relation of feminism and revolution see Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790 - 1827* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993); subsequently *W.W. and R.* In particular, for an explanation of how he uses these two words, see his preface (v - vii).

<sup>8</sup>For further discussion see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700 - 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). There has been much debate about when the notion of an English literary canon came into being. For Howard Weinbrot, Douglas Lane Patey and Harold Bloom, this happened after the Restoration. See Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 1- 15; Douglas Lane Patey, “The Eighteenth Century Invents the Canon,” *Modern Language Studies* 18 (1988): 17 - 37; Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 28; Thomas P. Miller, “What is Literature?: A Response to Richard Terry,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997): 102 - 103; Clifford Siskin, “A Response to Richard Terry’s Literature, Aesthetics, and Canonicity in the Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997): 103 - 105; and Clifford Ross, “Copyright and the Invention of Tradition,” *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26 (1992): 1 - 27. For alternative views, see, for example, Richard Terry, “Literature, Aesthetics, and Canonicity in the Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997): 80 - 101, and Marilyn Butler, “Revising the Literary Canon,” *Times Literary Supplement* 4 Dec 1987: 1349, 1359 - 60. Offering a particularly late date, Butler suggests: “A single, official English literary history emerges only in the 1820s” (1349).

<sup>9</sup>Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Flamingo (London: Fontana 1976), 32; subsequently “*Keywords*”; Williams defines the aesthetic, “with its specialized references to ART . . . , to visual appearance, and to a category of what is ‘fine’ and ‘beautiful’,” and he allies it to the subjective as well as suggesting that ‘aesthetic considerations’ and ‘practical or UTILITARIAN’ considerations are often opposed; the

countryside around them, rather than to artistic representations of it. As both the title and the substance of Wollstonecraft's essay "On Poetry, and our Relish for the Beauties of Nature" indicate, distinctions between nature and art were in themselves a topic for debate. For much of the eighteenth century, differences between ways of viewing countryside and landscape art were often minimised. As Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring examined in *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England* (1925), the fashion for Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa shaped eighteenth century views of England as well as of Italy.<sup>10</sup> Thus a Hegelian definition of "aesthetics" as the philosophy of art would be inappropriate in this context. This study, then, like the writers it considers, explores experiences of taste whether connected with nature or with art. It uses the term "aesthetic subject" in the sense of arbiter of taste; in literary terms, it refers to the reader, writer or critic of art, as opposed to the art object or focus of the gaze.

Discussions of taste in women's prose writing in this period were neglected, not because of their willingness to include both the natural and the artificial, but partly due to trends in literary scholarship and partly, as will be considered, because of the particular vehicles which women frequently chose. It was also because of the type of aesthetic experience that women writers either examined or were perceived to examine. Women writers often, for example, considered what de Bolla would call a discourse *of* rather than *on* the sublime.<sup>11</sup> De Bolla notes that one particular strand of aesthetic discourse, on the sublime, "became increasingly preoccupied with the discursive production of the excess: once it had begun to describe how an experience is sublime and what caused it, it began to create a discourse which [. . .] created the experiential possibility for sublime sensations" (12). According to de Bolla, this discourse on the sublime generates the experience of the sublime.

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writers discussed in this study were engaged in considering to what extent taste was individual and the relation of taste and practicality (*Keywords* 32).

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa on English Taste, 1700–1800* (1925; London: Cass, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime; Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).



However, a reluctance to engage in any detailed exploration of the latter can be traced in twentieth-century criticism, as Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-century England* (1935) demonstrates.<sup>12</sup> After carefully tracing the development of the discourse on the sublime, Monk remarks: "The new taste finds expression first among a group of learned ladies, who seem to have lived a considerable part of their erudite lives wrought up to the high pitch of the sublime" (212). The excess generated by the sublime is for Monk noted in the context of women's writing. This makes it easier for him to imply that it is a product of hysteria, unworthy of analysis. Monk then mocks the "Swan of Lichfield" for deliberately exposing herself to ocean storms while "people of less fine sensibilities were content to remain at home" (212). In particular, Monk is criticising the way Seward cultivated the sublime – his hostility stems from the notion that the sublime experience should not be encouraged. Monk is, as de Bolla might say, interested in the legislation of the occurrence. In this, Monk joins a long tradition of writers, including Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth, and Burney, who mocked certain varieties of sublime sensibility as overwrought. In contrast to these writers, however, he does not seek to distinguish between modes of sensibility. He does not recognise that such writing might have political and intellectual connotations which were as precise as the feeling portrayed seems undisciplined.

Monk was writing without the benefit of many of the texts now available and decades before the modern feminist movement. Nevertheless, his work serves to indicate how certain types of writing, viewed as descriptions rather than dissections of aesthetic experiences, have been insufficiently examined in the discussion of the eighteenth-century debate on taste. In particular, scholarly discussion of taste in the period has often focussed on the treatise, yet this was a form in which few women chose to write. An exception is Frances Reynolds, who in 1785 published *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of Our Ideas of*

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<sup>12</sup>Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Thought in XVIII-Century England; With a New Preface by the Author*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Michigan: Ann Arbor-U of Michigan P, 1960).

*Beauty*, but the work's frequent reliance on other aesthetic theories and imprecision of pronoun reference testify to some anxiety on the part of the author.<sup>13</sup> The essay format, on the other hand, was less formidable. Without the scholarly associations of the treatise, it could still be used as a vehicle for serious thought, as Addison's comment in the tenth number of *The Spectator* about bringing philosophy to the country's "tea-tables" suggests.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the female editor and essayist had been an accepted figure, particularly from the 1740s to the early 1760s.<sup>15</sup> That the essay form could be used by women writers to discuss aesthetics is indicated, not just by Wollstonecraft, but by, for instance, *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* (1773) by Anna Laetitia Aikin [Barbauld] and her brother John.<sup>16</sup> Barbauld explored the source of the audience's pleasure in the representations of pain in "An Inquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations: With a Tale" and examined the psychology of terror in "On the Pleasures Derived from Objects of Terror" (117 – 7, 190 – 219).

However, the Aikins' use of the essay format within a book rather than within a periodical coincides with the decline of the characteristic tones of the woman editor. Sarah Prescott and Jane Spencer note that "as the magazine format took over the periodical market, the distinctive voice of the female editorial persona was lost" (45). There was a move away from the conversational style more characteristic of periodical essays and an increasing tendency for volumes of essays by women to contain religious material. Hamilton's own use of the essay format in *A Series of Popular Essays* was philosophical rather than conversational.<sup>17</sup> However, Prescott and Spencer

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<sup>13</sup>Frances Reynolds, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty, etc* (1785), introd. James L. Clifford, Augustan Reprint Society 27 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1951).

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Addison, *The Works of Joseph Addison: With Notes by Richard Hurd, D.D.*, 6 vols (London: Bohn, 1854 - 1856), 2: 253; subsequently Addison.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion see Sarah Prescott and Jane Spencer, "Prattling, Tattling and Knowing Everything: Public Authority and the Female Editorial Persona in the Early Essay-Periodical," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23 (2000): 43 – 57, particularly 44.

<sup>16</sup>J. Aikin and A.L. Aikin, *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* (1773), 2nd ed. (London: Johnson, 1775).

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Hamilton, *A Series of Popular Essays, Illustrative of Principles Essentially Connected with the Improvement of the Understanding, the Imagination, and the Heart*

insist that the “change in the periodical market” which resulted in the decline of the female editorial personae “need not be interpreted as part of the decline of the eighteenth century woman,” since similar voices were found in the polemical writings of Hays, Wollstonecraft, Wakefield and Helen Maria Williams, and in the novel (54). Ann Radcliffe’s “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826) demonstrates both points.<sup>18</sup> The piece indicates that in 1826 the propriety of the essay form could still be an issue, and it demonstrates how other forms, in this case, the novel, became vehicles for similar voices. The editor’s note, attached to the essay, is revealing:

Having been permitted to extract the above eloquent passages from the manuscripts of the author of the “Mysteries of Udolpho” we have given this title to them, though certainly they were not intended by the writer to be offered as a formal or deliberate essay, under this, or any other denomination. They were, originally, part of an INTRODUCTION to the Romance, or Phantasie, which is about to appear. The discussion is supposed to be carried on by two travellers in Shakespeare’s native county, Warwickshire. (Folger Collective 331)

The commentator’s remark that Radcliffe’s observations “were not intended by the writer to be offered as a formal or deliberate essay, under this, or any other denomination,” both excuses any oddity found in the form of the essay and indicates that there is an issue of propriety at stake (Folger Collective 331). Hinting at Radcliffe’s own, much vaunted personal modesty, the remarks suggest that a woman as reportedly (and now as proverbially) retiring as Radcliffe might have thought the essay a genre less associated with domestic femininity than the novel. Nonetheless, the title of the essay, chosen by the periodical rather than by Radcliffe, is designed

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(1813), 2nd ed, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown and Cadell and Davies, 1815); subsequently *Popular Essays*.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826), *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, in *Women Critics 1660 – 1820: An Anthology*, ed. Folger Collective on Early Women Critics (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 330 – 38; the anthology is subsequently referred to as the Folger Collective. “On the Supernatural in Poetry” was

to suggest that these remarks have wider significance for her aesthetic thought.

Plucked out of the manuscript of a novel and given a suitable title and slightly different context, they gain a wider significance and so demonstrate that, given the proper acknowledgments and caveats, the novel can be mined for such opinions.

Nevertheless, this process has only recently become more established.

Women's contribution to aesthetic debate in the eighteenth century is referred to briefly and fairly dismissively in several wide ranging studies dealing with the history and development of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Philosophically orientated discussions of aesthetics in the mid-twentieth century were dominated by analytic thought which, concentrating on creating a precise language for art criticism, was not particularly accessible to twentieth-century non-philosophers. However, in the 1960s the direction began to change. The work of Arthur Danto and Nelson Goodman encouraged the use of historical and social context when considering art.<sup>19</sup> Their work was followed by feminist criticism which included similar considerations as well as questioning the assumptions within critical language.

By the 1980s more concern was being shown with uncanonical and earlier women's writing. There was also less preoccupation with buried symbols of repression in the texts themselves. Often covering a wide range of authors, these critical works hearkened back to B. G. MacCarthy's 1947 study which had suggested the existence of a tradition of women's writing.<sup>20</sup> Thus, feminist

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initially intended to form part of *Gaston de Blondville, or the Court of Henry III Keeping Festival in Ardenne, A Romance* (1826) but was not included (Folger Collective 330).

<sup>19</sup> See Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964): 571 - 84, and Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London: Oxford UP, 1969). For a brief discussion of the development of the criticism of aesthetics as it relates to feminism see the introduction to Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds. *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995) 1 - 22.

<sup>20</sup> B. G. MacCarthy, *The Later Women Novelists 1744 - 1818: The Female Pen*, vol. 2 (Cork: Cork UP; Oxford: Blackwell, 1947). See Janet Todd, ed. *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers: 1660 - 1800* (London: Methuen, 1984). Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora P, 1986) and the accompanying series of texts by Pandora also provide an obvious example. The process of exploration was aided by such attempts at cataloguing as Cheryl Turner's accessible checklist of "Women's Fiction Published in Book Form between 1696 and 1796" at the end of *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992) 152 - 211. Chronologically wider guides are provided by Janet Todd, ed. *A Dictionary of Women Writers*

criticism, itself an alternative voice, speaking in part from a marginalised position, rescued numerous women writers from obscurity and moved from the consideration of previously canonical work to the lesser known texts of the eighteenth century. This corresponds roughly to a process taking place in other areas of criticism. An emerging interest in the eighteenth-century novel, whether philosophic or revolutionary (terms themselves under debate), gothic or sentimental, did not immediately bring examination of the women writers who wrote them. However, it ensured their eventual inclusion and an awareness of their individual characteristics which the encyclopaedic works of the early twentieth century had not yet attempted to expose and which feminism did not always highlight.<sup>21</sup>

A survey of current scholarship, and traditions of scholarship, addressing women writers' relationship to aesthetics reveals significant assumptions and omissions, many of them the result of pre-established critical methodology. Feminist criticism draws attention to the exclusions of male discourse; but often itself leads to or perpetuates other exclusions. Even though feminist revisions of the canons of Leavis and Watt have overhauled the rhetoric of fiction, the need to overturn

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(London: Routledge, 1989), and Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy, eds *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Batsford, 1990). More recently, a growing awareness of the scope of women's writing in the eighteenth century has been suggested by the Folger Collective, Jennifer Breen, ed. *Women Romantics 1785 - 1832: Writing in Prose*, Everyman (London, Dent; Vermont, Tuttle, 1996), and Harriet Devine Jump, ed. *Women's Writing of the Romantic Period 1789 - 1836: An Anthology* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 1997). For a useful reference guide to the later part of the period considered in this thesis see R.C. Alston, *A Checklist of Women Writers, 1801 - 1900: Fiction, Verse, Drama* (London: Hall, 1990).

<sup>21</sup>It is, for example, easy to see this process by examining the critical treatment of the novel of sentiment. Its low critical status in the early twentieth century has been suggested, though Edith Birkhead did give an interesting discussion of the term "sentiment" in her article "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Novel" in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, vol. 11, comp. Oliver Elton (Oxford, Clarendon P, 1925). R. F. Brissenden's work *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974) continues the project. Still centred on the work of canonically accepted writers, such as Richardson, Sterne and Austen, it refers to a vast body of both French and English work, including Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) and Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (1778) (this was the second edition, the novel having been published anonymously the year before in Colchester under the title *The Champion of Virtue*) and it suggests the potential the works of these women had for further exploration. See Jane West, *A Gossip's Story, and a Legendary Tale* (1796), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols (London: Longman, 1797) and Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (1778), ed. James Trainer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977). Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, Methuen, 1986) capitalised on this opportunity, as did, to some extent, Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1992).

previous criticism has often left a residual Leavisite or Watt-ite agenda. In addition, reaction by feminist critics to writings on aesthetics could lead to assumptions about the existence of a contrasting aesthetic common to women writers. Patricia Yaeger's "Toward a Female Sublime" (1989), for example, presents in part a response to Thomas Weiskel's work, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976).<sup>22</sup> Weiskel discusses theories of the sublime and Wordsworth's own usage, using Blake as a counter example. Therefore types of the sublime found in women's writing are outside his remit, despite the apparent inclusivity of his title. Yaeger seeks to correct this omission, postulating the female sublime as a distinctive agency in women's writing, one which offers the potential for empowerment. Yaeger is advancing what Elaine Showalter would call a "female aesthetic," suggesting that women's writing is an expression of a specifically female consciousness.<sup>23</sup> However, such assumptions about the existence of a distinct aesthetic particular to women can lead to an elision of the differences between writers.

On the other hand, the influence of studies like Weiskel's also led to the work of women writers being examined only in the context of traditionally mainstream Romantic aesthetic theory. For example, Susan M. Levin's 1987 study, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* claims that Dorothy Wordsworth's treatment of imagination and the will has a different emphasis from that found in other Romantic writing.<sup>24</sup> Levin in the main chooses to compare Dorothy Wordsworth's work with that of the male Romantic poets, marking the differences in approach in order to prevent the misreading of Dorothy Wordsworth's writing. Her remit does not include any significant questioning of exclusions from or assumptions about this

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<sup>22</sup> Patricia Yaeger, "Toward a Female Sublime," *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989) 191 – 212; Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Elaine Showalter, "A Criticism of our Own: Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory," paper read at the School of Criticism and Theory, Dartmouth College, 1986, qtd. in Renée Lorraine's article, "Feminist Criticism," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 150 - 52.

canon.<sup>25</sup>

Other attempts to discuss women's writing in relation to aesthetics have shown more resistance to these difficulties. Jacqueline Labbe's study *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (1998), for example, implicitly avoids essentialism by contextualising particularity within women's writing with relation to the prospect view.<sup>26</sup> The association of the universal with authority in eighteenth century aesthetics made the prospect view more problematic for both men and women to claim, and, as the study demonstrates, their responses included a subtly deployed and nuanced particularism. In addition, Labbe's study considers the works of women authors more and less obscure alongside a range of traditionally canonical texts, avoiding the danger of elevating a few quasi-canonical figures at the expense of other, hitherto little assessed women writers.

Elizabeth Bohls's *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716 - 1818* (1995) is closer in approach to the present study.<sup>27</sup> Bohls examines what happens when women take up a central position in the discourse of aesthetics. She sets out to chart the relation of the women she considers with contemporary aesthetic theory, at once presenting their cultural background and distinguishing them from it. She does not attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies she finds in the aesthetics of the writers she studies. Rather, she asks: "How can

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<sup>24</sup>Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1987).

<sup>25</sup>Levin's work highlights another problem faced by investigators of women's writing, the discovery and justification of features in the writing which have previously been associated with a debased aesthetic and a debased notion of the female character, in particular, the quotidian. However, this difficulty has been partly obviated by a tendency to see the concern with detail in women's writing of this period as in line with certain developments in romanticism and as related to the rise of the novel as a genre. Neither of these are gender specific. See, for example, Margaret Anne Doody, "Sensuousness in Women's Poetry," in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon*, eds Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (London: Macmillan, 1999) 3 – 32; the study is subsequently referred to as Armstrong and Blain. Doody argues that an unease about solipsism contributed to making eighteenth-century poetry "the most directly sensuous poetry England has ever had" and suggests that eighteenth-century women poets' "exploration of sensuousness rests on a rediscovery and a reassertion of human relation to animal, bird, insect" (5, 10).

<sup>26</sup>Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's P, 1998); subsequently *Romantic Visualities*.

we reconcile Mary Wollstonecraft's sometimes narrow middle-class prejudices with her liberationist political program? [. . .] I have deliberately put together a selection of writers that will not let us be essentialist about gender or simplistic about feminism, that refuses to authorize easy generalizations about the way women think and write" (Bohls 11). Her refusal to hide the ideological inconsistencies of her chosen writers is more remarkable because much of the eighteenth-century aesthetic theory she considers insists on the importance of the universal rather than the particular. As Wollstonecraft and others resisted the totalizing discourses of aesthetic theorists, Bohls herself struggles against the formalising trend of academic critical thought, noting: "I have had to rethink the impulse (quite deeply internalized, I believe, despite deconstruction, in most of us with literary training) to resolve an interpretation into a coherent argument" (21). However, Bohls does not claim that she has found an alternative way of reading or a different aesthetics by which to judge these women writers. Instead, she more cautiously comments: "Although literary evaluation as such is not my primary concern work like mine can contribute indirectly to the ongoing overhaul of literary value" (Bohls 21 - 22).

Bohls's suspicion of essentialism and her determination to acknowledge the unique voices of the subjects she examines are shared by this study. As such it responds to the need which Janet Todd refers to in *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (1988) to gather "data" on particular women writers.<sup>28</sup> Though a great deal of work has been done in this field since Todd's 1988 study, this investigation continues the socio-historic enterprise, and as such, in the words of Todd, it is not concerned with " 'Woman,' not a part of women like the vagina or the uterus nor an expression of women like sexuality or 'feminine writing' " (4). Rather, the focus of this study is on five women writers who have a shared sense of the difficulty of appropriating literary and aesthetic authority. Their gender

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716 – 1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); subsequently Bohls.



gives them a common concern with representations of women and femininity.

Even without a feminist agenda these shared preoccupations and similar entries into discourse give sufficient reason to examine this group of writers. However, another argument for doing so arises - the argument that if the tradition of writing from which a text comes is invisible, then the work becomes hard to evaluate.<sup>29</sup> Claudia Van Gerven remarks:

As each succeeding generation of women [. . .] is excluded from the literary record, the connections between women [. . .] writers become more and more obscure, which in turn simply justifies the exclusion of more and more women on the grounds that they are anomalous - they just don't fit in.<sup>30</sup>

This argument applies to writing of various genres, as well as to women's writing, and is mentioned here because this thesis gathers some more of the data necessary in the process of re-evaluating women's writing of this period. Marilyn Butler, putting a case for "accurate, comprehensive, particularized historical criticism" in the 1987 introduction to *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975)

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<sup>28</sup> Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (Cambridge: Polity P, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Johnson makes a similar point. See Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, vol 1, 1731 – 1772 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992); subsequently *Letters*. Johnson observes this in a very different context, when he writes to Thomas Warton after seeing his *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser*. The first volume of this was published in 1754 and the second in 1762, the same year as Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*. Johnson writes to Warton on July 16, 1754, that: "You have shown to all who shall hereafter attempt the study of our ancient authors the way to success, by directing them to the perusal of the books which those authours had read [. . .] The Reason why the authours which are yet read of the sixteenth Century are so little understood is that they are read alone, and no help is borrowed from those who lived with them or before them" (Johnson, *Letters* 81). See also Thomas Warton, *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (London: Dodsley; Oxford: Fletcher, 1754); and Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 1762, ed. Hoyt Trowbridge, Augustan Reprint Society 101/102 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1963).

<sup>30</sup> Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991), 197; subsequently Warhol. On the matter of poetry, see also Elizabeth Eger, "Fashioning a Female Canon: Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and the Politics of the Anthology," in Armstrong and Blain 201 – 15; tracing the politics of the anthology, Eger points out that anthologies "are both the creators and barometers of public reading taste," as well as noting the involvement of women in the eighteenth-century use of anthologies as a cultural, national and educational tool (202). Eger also points out how quickly the material chosen (or omitted) from an anthology can distort the work of a poet in the public consciousness, or even, presumably, remove it (202).

makes a similar point with regard to the novel.<sup>31</sup> “Austen’s first critics and other readers,” she remarks, “picked up her novels’ signs which they understood not because they knew anything whatsoever of her private intentions, but because her novels deviated in detail from the detail of other novels like them” (Butler xvi). In a related way, viewing the work of Reeve, the Lees, Porter and Hamilton in the context of the contemporary discourse on aesthetics makes the signs in their texts more decipherable.

At the same time, the step of reading women against male-authored texts on aesthetics should not be seen as a careless perpetuation of the canon of aesthetic writers. Instead, the female authors considered here were responding to Hurd, Hume and Burke. Hamilton, Reeve, Porter and the Lees had little commentary in the way of more formal treatises by women to react to. The publication of Frances Reynolds’s treatise, for example, was an arduous process. After corresponding with Johnson on the subject in 1781 to 1782, she did not publish the work until after his death (Frances Reynolds i - iii). In 1785 she had two hundred and fifty copies privately printed and dedicated the piece to Mrs Montagu, whose response was unenthusiastic (Frances Reynolds iii - iv). Nevertheless, between February and July 1789, the *Enquiry* was reprinted by J. Smeeton (vii). According to James L. Clifford in his introduction to Reynolds’s work, “literary historians of the twentieth-century had extreme difficulty in tracking a copy of the *Enquiry* down” (i). The work was, however, found in 1935 in Wales amongst some manuscripts of Hester Lynch Piozzi, one of the immediate circle of Mrs Montagu. Evidence for the extent of its readership, therefore, is scanty; but it looks unlikely to have been widely known.

However, Piozzi and Hamilton were acquainted. Is it possible that Hamilton might have seen the treatise? A letter written from Hester Piozzi to Elizabeth Hamilton on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1805 suggests their friendship was relatively recent at

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<sup>31</sup>Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), pref. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1987), xlv; subsequently *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*.

that stage. Piozzi comments: "It would not please me tho that you should like my Letters as well as you do my Conversation," as though they had not written often to one another.<sup>32</sup> It therefore seems unlikely that Piozzi would have shown her new acquaintance a treatise published some twenty years before. Hamilton probably did not know the work, but she and the other writers considered here certainly responded to discussions on the aesthetic for women writers which occurred in other forms such as the novel. This kind of debate has been included in this study, as, for example, when the work of Porter on the enclosed sublime is compared with representations of the domestic space in the novels of Jane West and Austen.

In its examination of the discussions of aesthetics carried out through the novels and prose writing of Reeve, the Lees, Hamilton and Porter, this study is one of those "different and infinitely numerous itineraries through the past" which Todd mentions (95).

[History] is the genre from which women have been especially excluded and into which they are now entering as objects of study and as writing subjects. Yet there has been in recent years an assault on any notion that a discourse termed historical - or fictional - could denote reality; the result is a problematizing both of history and of the connection of literature and history. In place of history, we are getting histories, different and infinitely numerous itineraries through the past. So, where the eighteenth- and nineteenth century novelists seemed to absorb the project of history into fiction, our own age is obsessed with history as a series of fictions. (95)

Todd, however, assumes that such "itineraries" were unavailable to women writers until recently. Nevertheless, her remarks can be applied to earlier generations of women writers. Those considered here demonstrated a wariness about the

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<sup>32</sup>Hester Lynch Piozzi, letter to Elizabeth Hamilton, 13 May 1805, Autographed Letters Bequeathed by A.G. Kurtz, British Museum Additional Manuscripts 33964, f. 359,

construction of literary and national history. They exploited changes within the discourse of aesthetics in order to overcome its inherent gender bias. In doing so, they not only positioned themselves more securely as “writing subjects,” but also exploited the language of aesthetics to comment on the most important elements of the debate about political and national identity. These women participated, often via the language of taste, in what Alfred Cobban called “perhaps the last real discussion of the fundamentals of politics in this country.”<sup>33</sup> This thesis aims to reflect the multi-facted nature of their contribution. It begins with Reeve who exploits the fluctuating status of romance to strengthen the position of women as aesthetic subjects, but who also used it to support a political agenda often critically misinterpreted because it was coloured by the philosophy of the Old Whigs. In contrast, the Lees’ suspicion of literary history and challenge to disinterestedness is a forerunner of the sentimental radicalism of Hays and Wollstonecraft. Hamilton attempts to discipline such sentimentalism, as suggested by the critical attention which her use of satire has received. However, her sophisticated entry into the language of taste and her deft rewritings of the sublime and the beautiful have remained unremarked. More explicitly nationalistic redefinitions are provided by Porter. Porter rewrites the sublime, the beautiful and the metamorphic to position women at the centre of both taste and the nation, yet, simultaneously, her rewriting of history returns to and adapts Reeve’s use of romance. As this thesis demonstrates, and as Gary Kelly notes in his essay “Feminine Romanticism, Masculine History, and the founding of the Modern Liberal State” (1998), these women entered into the telling of history.<sup>34</sup> They themselves mount an “assault,” if not on the notion that history could represent reality, then on the idea that it had done so in the most advantageous way.

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Department of Manuscripts, British Library, London.

<sup>33</sup> Alfred Cobban, ed. *The Debate on the French Revolution 1789-1800* (1950), 2nd ed, The British Political Tradition 2 (London : Black, 1960), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Gary Kelly, “Feminine Romanticism, Masculine History, and the Founding of the Modern Liberal State,” *Romanticism and Gender*, ed Anne Janowitz, Essays and Studies Collected on Behalf of the English Association 51 (Cambridge, Brewer-Boydell, 1998) 1 – 18; subsequently “Feminine Romanticism.”

## “Real Solemn History”; Aesthetic Contexts

The main way in which women writers mounted this assault was in the area of taste - and within this space, the novel proved especially propitious. Their potential impact can be seen in the first volume of Halévy's account of nineteenth-century Britain, *England in 1815*, which, published in 1913, was available in English in 1924.<sup>35</sup> Kelly comments that the first volume:

mentions Austen and a few other women (Frances Burney, Princess Caroline, Princess Charlotte, Maria Edgeworth, and ‘Women, emancipation of’). Halévy's next volume, *The Liberal Awakening (1815 - 1830)* gets down to ‘real solemn history’, however, and women and women writers, as Catherine Morland would have expected, disappear. (Kelly, “Feminine Romanticism”

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In fact, as might be expected, references to women in Halévy's work become frequent when he considers literature and in particular when he remarks on the novel.<sup>36</sup> In their novel-writing and discussions of taste women were able to claim the position of aesthetic subject, and to discuss issues of political and national identity in a sheltered space. Critical discussions of women's place in relation to aesthetics have often, however, emphasised the gender bias in the discourse of taste. The position of women with respect to taste was more complex than such arguments often suggest. While women were granted some authority in the area, it was often with the duty of being ornamental; additionally, they were also more frequently associated with the beautiful and changeable rather than with the sublime.

Disadvantaged by education and issues of propriety, they found it difficult to claim

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<sup>35</sup> Elie Halévy, *England in 1815*, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker, introd. R. B. McCallum, 2nd ed, vol 1 of *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, 6 vols (London: Benn, 1949); subsequently Halévy.

<sup>36</sup> See in particular part iii, chapter ii, section IV (500 - 505), section V (505 - 11), section VI with commentary on novels (511 - 16), and section VII (517 - 24).

the position of original genius or critic. However, it is possible to overestimate the extent of these obstacles. Examining the background of eighteenth-century thought on aesthetics, this introduction will discuss the potential for the marginalisation of women and show how it was minimised by the female writers of the period. It will then show how issues of disinterestedness and the debate over the standard of taste made the language of taste a politicised vehicle which could be exploited, not just to improve the position of women as aesthetic subjects, but to question the distribution of power.

Female involvement in matters of taste was more acceptable than female participation in politics; however, the kind of contribution expected from them frequently made the nature of this participation rather double-edged. In 1773 Hester Chapone claimed that women were particularly imaginative, and added that “when properly cultivated, it becomes the source of all that is most charming in society.”<sup>37</sup> She was making an association between women and the ornamental which had been frequent throughout the century and which arose partly because of women’s assumed tendency towards the trivial and the superficial. Even periodicals such as *The Idler* and *The Spectator*, which were aimed at women and celebrated their improvement as a sign of civilisation, acknowledged such assumptions while promising change. Addison, for example, in the tenth issue of *The Spectator* laments the lack of “proper employments and diversions for the fair ones” (2: 255). Regretting the way in which women were often confined to the trivial, he writes that “amusements seem contrived for them, rather as they are women than as they are reasonable creatures” (2: 255). *The Spectator*, on the other hand, aimed at redirecting female interests, “divert[ing]” them, as Addison suggests with modest urbanity, from “greater trifles” (2: 255). In addition, women were associated with ideas of the ornamental because this was how they themselves were expected to appear. This is stated in its bluntest form by Rousseau: in *Emile* (1762) he details

the “ornamentation: mirrors, jewels, dresses, particularly dolls” that appeal to young girls.<sup>38</sup> Proceeding to discuss embroidery, Rousseau adds: “This voluntary progress is easily extended to drawing, for this art is not without its importance for the art of dressing oneself up tastefully”; they should not, however, draw figures or landscapes, but: “Leaves, fruits, flowers, draperies, everything which is useful for giving an elegant turn to clothing” (368). In Rousseau’s system, then, women are allowed to be producers of the aesthetic only as long as the primary aesthetic object they create is themselves.<sup>39</sup>

However, even this emphasis on the ornamental nature of femininity was exploited by women writers, as the example of Laetitia Matilda Hawkins’s *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H.M. Williams, with Particular Reference to Her Letters from France* (1793) demonstrates.<sup>40</sup> The work shows the ease with which women move from being the wielder of the gaze to its object. It also, however, provides an example of how this situation can be manipulated to allow indirect discussion of politics. Hawkins suggests that women are particularly suited to provide ornament:

We are not formed for those deep investigations that tend to the bringing into light reluctant truth, but when once she has appeared, when *vera incessu patuit Dea*, then it is within the female province to give her spirit and decoration, which the less flexible and less volatile male mind would fail in attempting. (Vivien Jones, *Women* 118)

Hawkins’s emphasis is on movement and change. Her “decoration” seems

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<sup>37</sup>Hester Chapone, from *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), in Vivien Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1990) 104 - 106, quoted from 106; subsequently *Women*.

<sup>38</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or on Education* (1762), trans. and introd. Allan Bloom, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1991), 367. For an account of the use of the detail of “leaves, fruits” and “flowers” and the use to which it was put to by women artists and embroiderers in defiance of its low status, see Jacqueline Labbe in *Romantic Visualities* (149 – 186).

<sup>39</sup>It is perhaps worth noting that while Wollstonecraft was influenced by Rousseau’s educational thought, primitivism and defiant assertion of the authority of the subjective, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) she strongly dismisses his thoughts on the education of women (*Political Writings* 150).

troublingly superficial, given that Reynolds had noted that while ornament can be related to moral beauty, it otherwise can “please but for a short time.”<sup>41</sup> Hawkins writes:

That we were not designed for the exertion of intense thought, may be fairly inferred from the effect it produces on the countenance and features. The contracted brow, the prolated visage, the motionless eye-ball, and the fixed attitude, though they may give force and dignity to the strong lines of the male countenance, can give nothing to soft features that is not unpleasant . . . (Vivien Jones, *Women* 118)

Without acknowledgment, Hawkins has shifted from considering women as creative individuals, to viewing them as objects, and as objects whose charm depends on movement. The apparent ease of this slippage demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining the position of aesthetic subject for women. However, in making these judgments Hawkins is herself retaining the position of critic. In addition, Hawkins is in fact concerned to minimise suggestions of superficiality in her connection of women and ornamental movement. For example, in following the Latin by making truth female, she complicates gender divisions, using the Latin tag at the very moment when she associates women with the ornamental.

Hawkins’s use of the language of taste and feminine refinement allows her access to politics. Hawkins writes in her second letter: “The study, my dear madam, which I place in the climax of unfitness [for females], is that of politics,” but it should not be forgotten here that she is making her own political move (Vivien

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<sup>40</sup>Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H.M. Williams, with Particular Reference to Her Letters from France* (1793), in Vivien Jones 117 – 120.

<sup>41</sup>According to Frances Reynolds, “general ornament and honour, appearing in fashions, arts of decoration, &c. &c.” is the third of three orders of taste (41 - 42). Reynolds values ornament: “True ornament is, to the eye, what eloquence is to the ear, their principles throughout are one, the truth or beauty of which exists in its exact relation or adaptation to the object it adorns, constituting the just, the *true*, the *beautiful*, objects, or qualities, which, in the conscious eye of taste, relate to moral beauty” (44). However, though “Ornament and harmonious sound are pleasing to the corporeal sense,” they: “When wanting a relative object, please but for a short time” (44).



Jones, *Women* 120). She is exploiting the connection between the female mind and ornamentation in order to undermine the position of Helen Maria Williams, whose sympathetic treatment of the French Revolution had provoked some hostility.<sup>42</sup> Williams's approach to politics exploited the sentimental to the full - Hawkins is keen to suggest that unrestrained emotion is not ornamental to the female mind. As Gary Kelly claims in *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790 – 1827*:

[Hawkins] attacks the Revolution and defends Britain in a way characteristic of the Revolution debate as conducted by men.

Hawkins deplores Williams's Revolutionary sympathy as all too feminine - too emotional, 'romantic', impractical, irrational - and expresses a growing hostility to women's political writing, both in France and Britain. (55)

Hawkins's rather conservative application is not the only response to the link between women and changing ornamentation. One common response was for authors to emphasise that both stillness and firmness come with being an aesthetic subject. Here Radcliffe provides a swift and easily recognisable example. Her heroines play, sing and read not only for male approval but for themselves, indulging in aesthetic activity partly in an attempt to calm and strengthen themselves.

As female writers had to negotiate with the concept of ornament, they also had to debate their own and their heroines' relation to the sublime and the beautiful. The association of the sublime with the masculine and of the beautiful with traits considered feminine occurs in a large number of both the primary and secondary central texts of eighteenth-century aesthetics. This association can be traced in Addison's *Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination*. Addison, in issue 412 of *The*

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<sup>42</sup>See, for example, Horace Walpole's comments in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis et al. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1937 – 1983) 48 vols; subsequently *Walpole's Correspondence*. On 26<sup>th</sup> July 1791 Walpole notes the arrest of rioters in Worcestershire and adds: "Mr Merry, Mrs Barbauld, and Miss Helen Williams will probably have subjects for elegies" (11: 320). See also his attack on the "slipshod muses" - "Misses Seward and Williams and half-a-dozen more of those harmonious virgins, have no imagination, no novelty" (33: 533).

*Spectator*, links beauty with a “secret satisfaction and complacency,” a feeling arranged so that each species “is most affected with the beauties of its own kind” (3: 399). His initial comment seems to link sexual attraction and beauty without any suggestion that one sex is more attractive than the other, but he then adds: “This is nowhere more remarkable than in birds of the same shape and proportion, where we often see the male determined in his courtship by the single grain or tincture of a feather” (3: 399) Addison’s (pre-Darwinian) example quickly locates the observer of beauty as the active and appropriating male, while beauty’s possessor is female and passive.

The connection between femininity and beauty becomes stronger with Burke. For Burke ruggedness, vastness and “the authority of a father” characterise the sublime, while smallness, smoothness, and delicacy approaching to weakness characterise beauty (*Enquiry* 91 – 111; 3, 1 - 10). Burke further comments that beauty:

where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness. In all this, they are guided by nature. (*Enquiry* 110; 3, 10)

For Burke what is natural in femininity is, paradoxically, founded on deceit. His version of beauty, so slight alongside the mighty sublime, has seemed devalourising and disempowering enough for critics to neglect it in favour of its counterpart.<sup>43</sup> However, as Amanda Gilroy mentions, this fails to allow for the fact that Burke’s beautiful is not a mere erasure of bodily deformity in the neoclassical tradition that

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<sup>43</sup> For examples of this concentration on the sublime see Weiskel, de Bolla, and Neil Hertz’s *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York, Columbia UP, 1985). This trend found a parallel in exploration of women’s writing, as with Patricia Yaeger’s essay, “Toward a Female Sublime.” There is a more recent tendency, highlighted in critics such as Runge, to resist this concentration on the sublime at the expense of the beautiful. See Laura L. Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660 1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 168 - 210.

Reynolds follows.<sup>44</sup> Rather, Burke's version of the beautiful makes femininity a construct, potentially with metamorphic power. This metamorphic potential was debated by women writers who could see such attractive transformations of the female body as a potential route to sexual and political power. They were also, however, aware that the method relied on trickery rather than rationality and could be seen as debasing.

Similarly, women both debated and manipulated the language which connected female beauty and delicacy. The connection was problematic for women writers because of the nervous theory which related moral refinement or 'delicacy,' and physical weakness. The confusion between the two is persistent in English literature, continuing long after the end of the eighteenth century, but it can be clearly seen in John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774).<sup>45</sup> Gregory frequently uses the word "delicacy," a word which signifies either moral refinement or the physical weakness so beloved by Burke. His text thus demonstrates how the perceived weakness of the female frame formed the basis for an essentialised code of womanly behaviour. For Gregory, moral, not physical delicacy is a reason not to dance too vigorously, not to laugh, and not to go to plays. Moreover, he comments, "there are many nameless delicacies, in female manners, of which none but a woman can judge" (Jones 45). Whether these are delicacies of the nursery or the closet, it is clear that Gregory means that women must be under constant self-censorship and surveillance in both male and female company. 'Delicacy' translates as an ethical subtlety that might make women useful moral judges and independent thinkers, but instead serves to imprison them in an internalised code which is the more claustrophobic because of its indefinable nature.

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<sup>44</sup>See Amanda Gilroy, "The Discourse of Beauty and the Construction of Subjectivity in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry*," *Liverpool Studies in Language and Discourse* 1 (1993): 45 - 70. Gilroy argues for the assessment of the "(subversive) force of Burke's text within its particular historical context, for in embracing imperfection as the mark of female beauty, Burke rejects the neoclassical ideals of beauty current during the period" (49). She then compares Burke's stance to Reynolds. However, the association of feminine beauty with imperfection or weakness, while not corresponding to the neoclassical ideals of beauty she mentions, were not uncommon, as Gregory's comments, overpage, suggest.

Again, however, women writers challenged the equation of feminine beauty and weakness. During the 1790s, in particular, languid women were attacked as a danger to themselves and the nation by both radicals and anti-Jacobins alike. The former considered that the languid woman might well be corrupted by the alleged decadence of the upper ranks, the latter, that she would be damaged by scraps of revolutionary philosophy fatal to her virtue. Women writers still made their heroines totter and blush, but some authors felt it necessary to suggest that genuine physical weakness in a woman did not mean ethical weakness. A clear example of this is *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price whose physical frailty, unlike Lady Bertram's languor, hides a keen and independent moral sense.

Perceptions of femininity hence limited the ways in which women could speak with propriety yet women manipulated the language of modesty and debated the moral and political effects of various versions of womanhood. Similarly, women frequently found that some of the experiences deemed necessary to be a discriminating reader, writer or critic were less available to them and so had to develop alternative strategies. The educational difficulties a woman might face in becoming qualified for literary authority are demonstrated by Shaftesbury's portrait of the gentleman of fashion.<sup>46</sup> According to Shaftesbury, to move with true grace or to write the best poetry, one must possess: "*Knowledg and good Sense: And not barely in that Knowledg, which is to be learnt from common Authors, or the general Conversation of the World; but from those particular Rules of Art, which Philosophy alone exhibits*" (104; 1. 111. 17 – 20). This emphasis on a liberal education clearly means that taste will follow a class and gender divide: only those who receive such an education, generally the high ranking males, possess refined taste. Of course, the model of the tasteful person undergoes many variations in the hands of different writers: in Addison's work it is angled towards

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<sup>45</sup> John Gregory, from *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), Vivien Jones, *Women* 44 - 53.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), ed. Philip Ayres, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999) 2 vols; subsequently Shaftesbury.

the middle classes and women; in Joseph Warton's work, aesthetic judgment is less the province of genteel readers, than scholars.<sup>47</sup> However, whether the emphasis on education makes tastefulness available to a more or less exclusive group, it is usually more difficult for females to claim the qualifications necessary for literary authority. Women may be sufficiently educated to enjoy the arts, but whether they would be - or wish to admit to being - educated in "those particular Rules of Art, which Philosophy alone exhibits" is a different matter.

However, even conservative women writers were insistent on the need to define, appreciate and capitalise on the mental powers that women were supposed to possess. Hawkins, for example, is trenchant on the powers of the female mind:

Dividing subjects of thought into *abstruse*, *serious*, and *light*, I consider only the former and the latter as peculiarly appropriated by either sex; the center is common to both [. . .] The peculiar properties of the female mind I should therefore reckon acuteness of perception, vivacity of imagination, and a concatenation of invention that disdains all limit. (Vivien Jones, *Women* 119)

This rather unruly "invention" seems unlikely to stem from a knowledge of the rules of art recommended by Shaftesbury. While the phrase "disdains all limit" ominously suggests a lack of self-control, it also indicates a tendency towards the sublime, and associates women with the exercise of taste, thereby supplying one

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<sup>47</sup>For example, see Addison's well-known desire, expressed in the tenth number of *The Spectator*, to "have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses" (2: 253). On this passage, Warton remarks on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 1754 in *The Adventurer* no. 139 (300 – 308) that "this purpose has in some measure been defeated by its success; and we have been driven from one extreme with such precipitation, that we have not stopped in the medium, but gone on to the other" (302). He continues: " Learning has been divested of the peculiarities of a college dress, that she might mix in polite assemblies, and be admitted to domestic familiarity; but by this means she has been confounded with ignorance and levity" (302); see Alexander Chalmers, ed. *The British Essayist; With Prefaces, Historical and Biographical*, vol. 25 (London: Johnson, Nichols; Baldwin; Rivington; Otridge; Richardson; Strahan; Faulder; Nicol; Payne; Robinson; Lowndes; Wilkie and Robinson; Scatcherd and Letterman; Walker; Cuthell and Martin; Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe; Lea; Darton and Harvey; Nunn; Lackington; Clarke; Kearsley; Law; White; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Cadell and Davies; Lane and Newman; Symonds; Barker; Wynne; Pote; Carpenter; Miller; Arch; Bagster; Boosey; Pheney; Floyer; Murray; Highley; Black, Parry and Kingsbury; Harding; Evans; Mawman; Booker; Asperne; Harris; Williams and Smith; Ebers; Edinburgh: Creech, 1808) 45 vols. For a fuller discussion of this, see Kramnick 44.

way of circumventing the requirement of a masculine education. Another way was provided by the increasing emphasis on the subjective and psychological within the discourse of taste.<sup>48</sup> As Martin Kallich remarks in *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England* (1970), for example, in the critical works of such respected theorists as Kames and Gerard:

the system of Aristotle is displaced by an altogether different system, that of Hume [ . . . ] They do not aim, however, to subvert Aristotelian order and structure and the rules for judging and creating regular works of art, but to ground critical theory anew upon Hume's 'discoveries' in the philosophy of human nature.<sup>49</sup>

This emphasis on the scrutiny of the human mind favoured women writers as the opportunity for such observations were available to them in a way that a classical education frequently was not.

The positions of critic and creator were equally difficult to claim.

Considering the former, Hume writes in "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757):

A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him [ . . . ] One accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations, can alone rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its

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<sup>48</sup>The suggestion of the move from objective to subjective in eighteenth-century aesthetics has become a critical commonplace. See, for example, George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 3; Walter John Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1957), 309; and, on the sublime, Monk 236. This is complicated by Frances Ferguson in her study *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (London: Routledge, 1992); subsequently Ferguson; she begins by positing that the "advent of aesthetics" led to an increased interest in the mental image (1). She comments that Burke's "procedure, in discussing the sublime and the beautiful and our thoughts about them, is to trace mental images first as if they were the affective traces of objects and then as if they were objects themselves" (Ferguson 1). Another prominent strand in the criticism of eighteenth-century aesthetic thought is the emphasis on the influence of ethics at the birth of aesthetics.

<sup>49</sup>See Martin Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England: A History of the Psychological Method in English Criticism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 133.

proper rank among the productions of genius.<sup>50</sup>

This idea of comparison persists throughout the century, recurring in Frances Reynolds's *Enquiry*, and it privileges those most able to travel. It also favours those with access to foreign languages "of different ages," languages which would presumably include Latin and Greek. The experience required for creativity was similarly demanding. Addison, for example, when considering the poet, emphasises the need for certain innate qualities, then advises the poet to take pains with his imagination by gathering knowledge of the country and the court, as well as of the classics. He writes: "Among those of the learned languages who excel in this talent [of helping to open a man's thoughts], the most perfect in their several kinds, are perhaps, Homer, Virgil, and Ovid," before going on to make quotations in the original languages (Addison 3: 416). Greek and Latin were not generally considered suitable for women, and despite the availability of translations, the writers studied here were often acutely conscious of this common gap in female education.

Indeed, as a compensating strategy Clara Reeve, despite her own knowledge of Latin, is partly attempting to establish a canon of romance which does not require such skills, and which would therefore be more accessible to women.<sup>51</sup> For Reeve, the Lees, Porter and Hamilton, the epics of Homer and Virgil were less

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<sup>50</sup>David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (1777), ed. Eugene F. Miller, with an apparatus of variant readings from the 1889 version by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, revised ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985) 226 – 49, quoted from 238; subsequently *Essays*. "Of the Standard of Taste" was published in a 1757 work, *Four Dissertations*, of which it and the essay "On Tragedy" were incorporated into the 1758 edition of *Essays and Treatises* (*Essays* xiv).

<sup>51</sup>See Thomas Warton, *History of English Poetry from the Twelfth to the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (1774 – 1781), ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (1871), 4 vols, Anglistica and Americana 18 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968); Warton's work is particularly pertinent here. When considering the age of Queen Elizabeth, he remarks: "Every young lady of fashion was carefully instituted in classical letters [ . . . ] Among the learned females of high distinction, Queen Elizabeth herself was the most conspicuous [ . . . ] And although perhaps a princess looking out words in a lexicon, and writing down hard phrases from Plutarch's *Lives*, may be thought at present a more incompatible and extraordinary character than a canon of Windsor understanding no Greek and but little Latin, yet Elizabeth's passion for these acquisitions was then natural, and resulted from the genius and habitudes of her age" (4: 356). Warton's comments are suggestive when considering why Reeve chose a text from the Elizabethan era to translate. Apart from the growing status of Elizabethan literature and its use for promoting the romance, perhaps a translation from the age of Elizabeth, a time associated with women's knowledge of the classics, might lend Reeve's endeavour greater acceptability.

important, as was Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Addison's "perfect master in all these arts of working on the imagination" was Milton, "divine" because "what can be conceived greater than the battle of the angels, the majesty of the Messiah, the stature and behaviour of Satan and his peers?" (3: 418). Yet this perfect master of sublimity was, Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), problematic for women writers.<sup>52</sup> They argue that women writers of the nineteenth century showed an anxiety of influence about Milton. Gilbert and Gubar's work resulted in the promotion of such writers in the canon. Reeve, the Lees, Hamilton and Porter, however, while paying compliment to Milton's greatness, do not spend any significant time responding to him. They look to romance for a literary heritage, exploiting the new emphasis on *belles lettres* and vernacular traditions. This tendency has been overlooked in the past because lying largely outside the search for responses to Milton. Nonetheless, the interest in romance is significant and Reeve's drawn-out attempt to gain status for both it and the novel as genres and for women as readers, writers and critics is an important example of it.

Given the debate over the proper provinces and extent of female influence on taste, genius and originality were also problematic qualities for women writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to claim. The two often had masculine associations. Genius was Janus-faced. It was associated with the bustle, competition and even excess of a market place, and, as such, formed part of a tendency to look for human rather than divine causes and solutions. However, just as the vastness of the sublime gave rise to religious emotions, genius was sometimes connected with harmony and virtue, in a way that was spiritual and idealist, rather than empirical. These views of genius, though conflicting, were nevertheless frequently found intermixed, and at times shared similar features. For example, in both traditions there are writers who suggest that genius might flourish under primitive conditions but the former tend to stress the chaos of a savage existence, while the latter

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<sup>52</sup>Addison 3: 418; Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP,



emphasised its simplicity. Either, however, could be awkward from the viewpoint of a female writer trying to apply them.

Explanations of genius founded on stories of struggle and competition presented women writers with particular difficulties. Even in the context of art the marketplace is a difficult one for women to enter either as traders or arbiters. On the prosaic level of commercial exchange, when a woman enters the market place it is too often uncharitably supposed that all she is selling is herself, as Frances Burney's heroine Juliet demonstrates in *The Wanderer* (1814).<sup>53</sup> This is also suggested by the episode in Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) where the heroine's paintings, though on display in a shop, are purchased by her would-be lover.<sup>54</sup> Laura is carefully protected by Brunton from the bustle of the commercial world.<sup>55</sup>

The tendency to emphasise the spiritual and harmonious aspects of genius proved potentially less problematic. It can be found in the work of John Dennis, Shaftesbury, Edward Young and Alexander Gerard. Dennis, for example, in *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704), suggests that the greatest acts of human creativity must imitate the divine: "As man is the more perfect, the more he resembles his Creator: The *Works* of Man must needs be more perfect, the more they resemble his Makers. Now the *Works* of God tho' infinitely various, are extremely regular," he

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1979), for example, 12, 131.

<sup>53</sup>Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties* (1814), eds. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody, introd. Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: World's Classics-Oxford UP, 1991).

<sup>54</sup>Mary Brunton, *Self-Control: A Novel* (1811), introd. Sarah Maitland, *Mothers of the Novel* (London: Pandora P, 1986), 77.

<sup>55</sup>Brunton's second heroine is not protected in this way. See Mary Brunton, *Discipline* (1815), introd. Fay Weldon, *Mothers of the Novel* (London: Pandora P, 1986). There her heroine, Ellen Percy, is shown working to make small fancy goods in unfavourable market conditions. For further insight into the financial situations of Brunton's heroines see Sarah Smith, "Men, Women, and Money: The Case of Mary Brunton," *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670 - 1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Ohio: Ohio UP, 1986) 40 - 47. See also Linda Nochlin, "Women, Art, and Power," *Women, Art, and Power, and Other Essays* (London: Thames, 1989) 1 - 36. The potential unpleasantness faced by the professional woman artist is suggested by Nochlin with regard to the Victorian era. See her discussion of Emily Mary Osborn's painting, "Nameless and Friendless," which for a long time was not identified as referring to the plight of the woman artist but which nonetheless suggests her vulnerability to sexual, economic and artistic insult (15). Cheryl Turner discusses the consequences and routes around this difficulty for female writers, including patronage and subscription. See in particular Turner 102 - 26.

comments.<sup>56</sup> Dennis only uses the term “genius” once in this work, shortly after referring to Milton (125). He applies the term to the artist who, in Dennis’s account, raises the passions by depicting the divine and so causes his readers to be “mov’d by Sacred Ideas” (124). Duff, who connects genius with originality, also indicates it is regular, harmonious and virtuous.<sup>57</sup> He suggests, for example, that the genius of original poetry is best displayed in an “uncultivated state” because of the “simplicity and uniformity” of ancient manners as opposed to the “Diversity, Dissipation, and excessive Refinements of modern Manners” (290). Similarly, Young writes that “an Original author is born of himself, is his own progenitor, and will probably propagate a numerous off-spring of imitators, to eternize his glory; while mule-like imitators die without issue.”<sup>58</sup>

Young’s faith in the individual’s own conscience and creative powers offer a solution to women writers’ attempts to combine propriety and originality. The creativity of his author is an echo of God’s act of creation and he may ignore cultural restraints and opinions because he is heeding a faculty akin to his own conscience. Wollstonecraft can be seen to use a similar argument in *Original Stories* (1788) where her narrator, Mrs Mason, insists that while family pride may be more beneficial than other kinds of pride, it still leads the weak-minded to harm (*Works* 4: 431). Anna replies:

We ought to be proud of our original, but we should trace it to our  
Heavenly Father, who breathed into us the breath of life. - We are his  
children [when] we try to resemble Him. (*Works* 4: 431)

Wollstonecraft is using the notion that our origin is heavenly to suggest that it is not human opinions and rules that should be followed but rather the divine. These ideas are given a moral application in *Original Stories*, but elsewhere Wollstonecraft

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<sup>56</sup> John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), introd. John Valdimir Price, *Foundations of Literary Theory, The Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge/ Thoemmes P, 1994), 6.

<sup>57</sup> William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767), introd. John Valdimir Price (London: Routledge/Thoemmes P, 1994) 291.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), ed. Edith J. Morley (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1918), 30.

discusses them in terms of creativity. In fact she claims a version of genius very similar to Young's for herself and her heroine. In the advertisement to *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) Wollstonecraft argues that her heroine is "neither a Clarissa, a Lady G-, nor a Sophie":

It would be vain to mention the various modifications of these models, as it would to remark, how widely artists wander from nature, when they copy the originals of great masters. They catch the gross parts; but the subtile spirit evaporates [. . .] Those compositions only have power to delight, and carry us willing captives, where the soul of the author is exhibited [. . .] Those chosen few, wish to speak for themselves, and not to be an echo - even of the sweetest sounds - or the reflector of the most sublime beams. The paradise they ramble in, must be of their own creating . . . . (*Works* 1: 5)

Wollstonecraft's model of inspiration has a theological framework. She allies originality through inner transcendence with genius, and in this she is surprisingly like Young. Furthermore, she not only claims the status of original thinker for herself but also associates these qualities of genius with her heroine. Mary has a thinking mind, the "grandeur" of which "is derived from the operations of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source" (*Works* 1: 5). Young had seen book learning as a barrier to original genius and Mary's self-education mirrors this.

Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft is uncommonly bold in appropriating this version of genius for her heroine. More usual was an emphasis on learning through personal experience or being able to distinguish reliable from unreliable sources. Even when authors did not emphasise a heroine's originality, they were concerned with her mental independence and ability to criticise the information she is given accurately. Exploration of how independent, if not how original, a heroine's thought should be is more or less ubiquitous. Radcliffe's heroines, for instance, learn independence and self-reliance in the course of their adventures, and their growing fortitude is often

strengthened by aesthetic activity. One of the most extended and sophisticated analyses of female independence is provided by Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818) and, significantly for this study, she also sketches the issue's possible national importance. One of *Persuasion*'s important cameos is the Admiral's wife, Mrs Croft, who, confronted with her husband's driving, "coolly giv[es] the reins a better direction herself," leading Anne to think, "with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs" (Austen, *Novels* 5: 92). The strength of character shown by the Admiral's wife, contrasted with the unreasoning wilfulness of Louisa Musgrove, is a reminder that the debate over female independence and choice of reading matter has national significance.

In fact, the issue of female independence and self-presentation had parallels both with the discussion over the respective merits of originality and tradition and with the debate over the correct mode of government which developed in the last part of the eighteenth century. In the discussion about whether the constitution should be preserved for reasons of tradition or redesigned, the political significance of mental and aesthetic independence was obvious to radicals and anti-Jacobins alike. The relationship between nation and the aesthetic subject had been an issue of some debate throughout the eighteenth century. In the early decades an emphasis was placed upon the public nature of art. As the century wore on, however, a shift occurred from an aristocratic account of taste to one more accessible to the middle ranks, generating a debate as to the function of art in society. An example of the earlier aristocratic notion of taste in the *Characteristicks* is provided by Shaftesbury, who linked the condition of art to political liberty.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Discussing the differences in French and English taste, he notes that, "the high Spirit of *Tragedy* can ill subsist where the *Spirit of Liberty* is wanting. The Genius of this Poetry consists in the lively Representation of the Disorders and Misery of *the Great*; to the end that *the People* [. . .] may be taught the better to content themselves with Privacy, enjoy their safer State, and prize the Equality and Justice of their *Guardian LAWS*" (*Characteristicks* 2: 117; i. 20 – 25). Such poetry is not, however, suitable for those who "are taught to idolize the next in Power above 'em" (*Characteristicks* 2: 117; i. 29 – 30). Shaftesbury outlines that the law of the land applies to all, creating a nominal state of equality in which virtue is possible. His writings convey here and elsewhere the belief that a spirit of liberty produces great art

However, by the 1750s there was a feeling that the liberty Britain supposedly enjoyed was not bringing the predicted artistic fruits. In particular, examples given to support the notion that freedom and great art were connected were not strictly pertinent to merchantile eighteenth-century Britain. This highlighted a need to redefine what “liberty” and participation in the public life might mean within this new context. Michael Meehan notes in *Liberty and Poetics in Eighteenth Century England* (1986): “By the 1760s, most had accepted the fact that British liberty was neither particularly Roman nor Grecian in character.”<sup>60</sup> He writes that such an:

assertion of national singularity, and the attempts to read in the nation’s political fortunes the outlines of a new aesthetic, did promote a national confidence among writers, and offered a powerful theoretical urgency to a growing ideal of independence, of taking aesthetic character and artistic ideals from within the culture, from the directions offered in the national history, from the demands of local government and from the demonstrated strengths of local achievement. (Meehan ii)

The need to redefine participation in public life is noted by John Barrell in *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: ‘The Body of the Public’* (1986) with regard to the Royal Academy, founded in 1768:

If the Academy was to be represented, and its existence justified, as a public body, this could be done only by reiterating the claim that painting was an art whose function was to promote the public interest,

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and that, conversely, great art functions to support the “spirit of liberty” in the state. The position that Shaftesbury was thinking of a wider audience than Lord Somers, to whom he dedicates the work, and the gentlemen of fashion, is canvassed by David Marshall in his essay “Taste and Aesthetics: Shaftesbury and Addison: Criticism and the Public Taste,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, IV: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997) 633 – 57, particularly 641. See also *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) where Philip Ayres connects Shaftesbury’s desire to promote civic consciousness with stoicism: “Though as a code of conduct Stoicism gradually gave way to the new Shaftesburian emphasis on manners and taste, seen at its most marked in Chesterfield, in Shaftesbury himself it still exists alongside that emphasis, and its stress on civic engagement reinforced Shaftesbury’s emphasis on the obligation of the oligarchy to promote civic consciousness and the arts under the panoply of political liberty” (55).

and that claim could be made only by reasserting, in the language of civic humanism, that painting could confirm “public spirit” in a nation. But the very factors that had led to the attenuation of that claim in the mid-century made it impossible simply to reaffirm it now, without qualification or without an attempt to take account of how modern Britain differed from Periclean Athens, renaissance Florence, or from the ideal polity imagined by Shaftesbury. It was therefore necessary to consider how ‘public spirit’ might manifest itself otherwise than by acts of public virtue . . . .<sup>61</sup>

In particular, the private lives of the subjects of Britain often made ideals of civic heroism unavailable to them and a new notion of the way in which art and the tasteful individual affected the nation became necessary. Consequently, as the middle ranks began to appropriate and change the hitherto largely aristocratic discourse of taste, which qualities could be considered tasteful were much debated. The quality of disinterestedness, for example, had been associated with both moral and tasteful behaviour and viewed as essential for participation in national life. In many ways, however, it was an aristocratic notion that had to be adapted by those lower on the social scale wishing to appropriate it. Discussions of the standard of taste were similarly preoccupied with issues of inclusivity. As will be seen, this type of discussion was used by certain women writers not only to strengthen their position within the discourse of taste, but also to comment on issues of rank and national identity.

Disinterestedness manifests itself in widely differing ways in eighteenth-century discussions of taste. Sometimes it appears in the guise of universality or detachment from local circumstances (as for Radcliffe’s heroines); occasionally it appears as impersonality; frequently it simply takes the form of high-mindedness. However, disinterestedness often functions to occlude large numbers of voices, as

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Meehan, *Liberty and Poetics in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Croom, 1986), ii; subsequently Meehan.

can be seen by a brief examination of eighteenth-century thought on the subject.<sup>62</sup>

Disinterestedness had status attached to it and because of this it was a quality contested for by the better off. Sir Joshua Reynolds provides a telling example in his *Discourses on Art*, delivered from 1769 to 1790, of how disinterestedness could be exploited to facilitate the middle orders' access to taste while excluding the lower orders from experiencing and, by extension, from producing art.<sup>63</sup> Reynolds is at pains to suggest that painting is not an imitative art.<sup>64</sup> It has been suggested by Barrell that Reynolds's preoccupation with the universal in painting links him to the discourse of civic humanists.<sup>65</sup> Within the terms of this discourse it was thought that the practice of mechanic crafts and trades led to an overspecialisation, a narrow preoccupation with earning money and with the particulars of the employment. These features would prevent the development of a generalising habit of thought, making the individual unsuitable for participation in national affairs.

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<sup>61</sup> John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986), 2.

<sup>62</sup> Early discussions, like those on the sublime, considered disinterestedness in the light of its moral rather than aesthetic importance. See, for example, Jerome G. Stolnitz, "On the Origins of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961/62): 131–43, in particular 132, where Stolnitz discusses Shaftesbury's response to the notion of prayer as egotism, examining his argument that disinterestedness was necessary for true virtue. Later, the notion of disinterestedness was connected more explicitly to art and observation. For Addison disinterestedness became an imaginative and, by extension, an aesthetic property. In the four hundred and eleventh issue of *The Spectator* he refers to the "innocent pleasures" of the imagination, suggesting that an imaginative man has "greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession" (3: 395–96). Addison's example suggests how the one of the most important signs of aristocracy, land, and taste are linked in popular conception. Importantly, it also demonstrates how the discourse of taste gives those without property access to disinterestedness.

<sup>63</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (1797), ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1997); subsequently *Discourses*.

<sup>64</sup> In his second discourse of December 11th, 1769, Reynolds remarks that painting is not based on "mechanical practice" (29). In his third discourse of December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1770, he states that the painter should remove "accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities" (41).

<sup>65</sup> For Barrell's suggestion that the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768 led to an adaption of the discourse of civil humanism in order to emphasise the Academy's public function, and for Barrell's definition of the term, see John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting* 1–68. His second chapter deals with Reynolds; see 69–162. For the counterargument that Barrell's book privileged the civic humanism tradition and led other critical commentators to do the same at the expense of other contemporary traditions in art history see Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996). The tradition in art theory pointed out by Barrell is, however, particularly important here because of the influence that Royal Academy thought had on Jane Porter. See Chapter IV below.

Reynolds is, however, extremely elusive when outlining the significance of this doctrine in terms of rank:

afterwards, when society is divided into different ranks, and some are appointed to labour for the support of others, those whom their superiority sets free from labour, begin to look for intellectual entertainments. Thus, whilst the shepherds were attending their flocks, their masters made the first astronomical observations; so musick is said to have had its origin from a man at leisure listening to the strokes of a hammer. (*Discourses* 70)

Reynolds's two examples are cunningly arranged to suggest that artist and audience are from the same social class. In the first example, his star-gazing masters are participating in an activity which requires them to observe and calculate at the same time; they are both audience and originators. This activity is, however, intellectual rather than aesthetic. In his second example, dealing with art, Reynolds does not state directly that the artist and the audience are one and the same. His language is more subtle. The audience is clearly the man at leisure. However, closer examination reveals he is also the creator of the music. The blows of the hammer are merely sounds when the labourer makes them - it is the listener's perceptions that make them music. Reynolds is coy about the class implications of this - the words "said to have" distance him from such claims, while his relaxing listener is not directly said to be "master." Nonetheless, the first example is there to suggest what Reynolds seems reluctant to state directly with regard to art. From this it is possible to see that he believes the artist and audience must come from the same class, that which is leisured and powerful. Others are excluded from it, fated to produce the blows of the hammer without having the ability or opportunity to generalise from them. Art, it would appear, is the secret of the upper classes. However, Reynolds is also manoeuvring for status. As a portrait painter, he might be perceived to be of lower rank than his subjects, with whom he comes into intimate contact. His description here argues that a conscious creator of art would be of a high rank. His



account is therefore coloured by the advantage to the portrait painter in being conversant with the behaviour of his clients.

Reynolds is obscure about the narrative of exclusivity which attaches to taste because it is a difficult one to maintain. Taste requires an element of exclusivity if it is to function as Reynolds wishes, as a social control. However, the exclusivity of taste presents several dangers. On the one hand, if taste is too exclusive and the labourer and the leisured listener become estranged, there will be a lack of social cohesion. On the other hand, if taste becomes too inclusive, the corruption of fashion and envy of the upper classes might destabilise society.

Women writers examined both aspects of the problem. Frances Burney, for example, emphasised the dangers of aestheticising poverty until emotion is only produced by picturesque poverty rather than real suffering. Eagerness to be immersed in the culture of sensibility could leave little time to consider real sorrow, as Sir Sedley Clarindel warns in Burney's *Camilla* (1796):

We are at such prodigious expense of sensibility in public, for tales of sorrow told about pathetically, at a full board, that if we suffer much for our own private concerns to boot, we must always meet one another with tears in our eyes. We never weep now, but at dinner, or at some diversion.<sup>66</sup>

In *The Wanderer* this lack of social cohesion is depicted even more plainly. Burney shows her heroine struggling to earn a living by using her talents for ornament. Juliet (or Ellis, as she is known for much of the novel) is humiliated and deprived her wages by the supposedly genteel people of Brighthelmstone, while the callous Mrs Maple refuses to see her music tuition as work at all. Burney is arguing for the right to receive payment for such ornamental activities without feeling humiliation, and drawing uncomfortable parallels between England and revolutionary France. In

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<sup>66</sup>Frances Burney, *Camilla or a Picture of Youth* (1796), ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (London: Oxford UP, 1972), 473. See also 93 - 94, where fashionable women give money to charity because they wish to win a brooch, not because they want to alleviate suffering.

France Ellis is persecuted because of her name and in England, despite her obvious and repeatedly demonstrated refinement, she is punished for her lack of one.

Burney's anxieties were counterbalanced by fears that the encouragement of the arts might lead to the break down of social distinction. Such a concern is present in Frances Reynolds's abrupt and to some extent self-contradictory statement that widespread encouragement of the arts leads to corruption. Frances Reynolds devotes most of her work to suggesting the links between virtue and taste, indicating the importance of good taste to the strength and reputation of the nation. However, she abruptly shifts viewpoint at the end of her treatise: "But, though the arts are thus beneficial to the growing principles of taste, respecting a few individuals, it is well known that their establishment in every nation has had a contrary effect on the community in general," because their encouragement leads to the desire for fame and the love of riches, and hence "the general diffusion of corruption must ensue" (Frances Reynolds 48). The spread of the arts throughout the nation poses a threat to social order. The link that Reynolds makes between the two conditions has its roots in a commonplace of histories of Rome which present luxury as fatal to civic sentiments. That the concern is a persistent one is suggested again almost thirty years later in *Mansfield Park*, published the same year as *The Wanderer*. There Sir Thomas has:

given the scene painter his dismissal, long enough to justify the pleasing belief of his being then as least as far off as Northampton.

The scene painter was gone, having spoilt only the floor of one room, ruined all the coachman's sponges, and made five of the under-servants idle and dissatisfied. (Austen, *Novels* 3: 190 - 91)

Austen's swift summary of the damage caused by the scene painter proves her command of litotes - her brevity and Sir Thomas's dispatch contrast amusingly with the more lengthy and grim prognostications of writers such as Reynolds. Nevertheless, it is clear that, for Austen too, the commerce attached to taste

threatens the social order by promoting travel, an accompanying lack of social stability or cohesion, and inflated ambitions.

Where such fears appear in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century novel, they are often counteracted by an emphasis on aesthetic experience through nature rather than art and an insistence on local attachment. In Austen's case, the scene painter's antithesis is Christopher Jackson, whom Tom, trying to persuade Edmund to approve of his play, optimistically mentions with the remark that, "as the carpenter's work may be all done at home by Christopher Jackson himself, it will be too absurd to talk of expense. – and as long as Jackson is employed, every thing will be right with Sir Thomas" (*Novels* 3: 128). More pronounced, less conservative examples are given by Hamilton and Wollstonecraft. As has already been seen, Wollstonecraft approves of using nature rather than art as the source of aesthetic experiences, and it may be remembered that her unimagined companions were migratory, participating in the culture of fashionable exchange. Wollstonecraft's focus is the middle class, whereas Hamilton is interested in protecting the lower orders from fashion. All three, however, participated in the debate over the role of art in the nation. All were concerned that the middle-class appropriation of taste would degenerate into a pursuit of fashion and status that would in turn cause the collapse of the family unit and the social fabric itself.

As these examples demonstrate, the degree to which taste was exclusive was under constant discussion and re-negotiation during the eighteenth century, with women writers taking a significant part in the debate. Additionally, thinkers on the subject were, as Cottom notes, at a period which was "being nudged toward relativistic postulates by the doctrine of association in psychology, the beginnings of a modern historical consciousness, and the popularisation of comparative anthropology in fictional works like *The Persian Letters* as well as in nonfictional accounts of voyages."<sup>67</sup> These shifts, along with worries about who was fit to make

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<sup>67</sup>Daniel Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 1; subsequently Cottom.

judgments of taste, led to a search for a standard by which the correctness of such judgments could be measured. Middle-ranking, domestic and mercantile values, often perceived as feminised, had to be taken into account and women writers benefited from this by being able to place their values closer to the standard. As will be seen, women writers also disrupted the previously central values of taste, challenging the detachment and coherence of narrative.

One particularly well-known attempt to argue for a common basis for aesthetic judgment, although predating some of the developments Cottom outlines, is Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (*Essays* 226 - 249). Hume tries to establish common standards by arguing that "the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely the same in all men" (*Essays* 241). However, in most people, "general principles" will not be given "full play" because the "organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect," suggesting that we should therefore look to critics who possess these attributes for our standard (*Essays* 241). Troubled by obvious differences in judgments about taste, Hume is forced to make apparently universal psychological features ineffective in the majority of cases:

Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. (*Essays* 241)

Hume's standard is riven by the same gender and class distinctions that operate in the area of disinterestedness. With regard to class, Hume's arbiter of taste again needs leisure, education and money to compare, practice and remain unprejudiced - his innate skills have to be improved. According to Hume, a labouring man is unlikely to have the innate quality of "delicate sentiment."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Hume, for example, thought the "skin, pores, muscles and nerves of a day labourer are different from those of a man of quality, so are his sentiments, actions and manners," as G. J. Barker-Benfield notes (132).

The positioning of gender within the discursive area is more complex. When the qualities that Hume presents as essential to the good critic are examined, there appears no reason why a woman should not possess or aspire to them. The last three can after all be cultivated, while elsewhere Hume suggests that women may actually possess more delicacy of sentiment than men. However, in practice, any woman wishing to become an arbiter of taste would face the problems of propriety previously suggested. In seeking to lead opinion, she might very well lose some of her modesty.<sup>69</sup> While not an arbiter, then, is she one of the rest of mankind who must follow the more correct critics, subject to standards of taste which she is not allowed to define?<sup>70</sup> As Carolyn Korsmeyer notes in her essay "Gendered Concepts and Hume's Standard of Taste," "in spite of an often inclusive use of the term 'man,' Hume on several occasions alludes to females as though they stand outside the domain of interest he investigates: human nature."<sup>71</sup> The apparently universal

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<sup>69</sup>In his essay "Of Impudence and Modesty" (*Essays* 552 - 56) Hume discusses modesty with regard to "the generality of mankind" (*Essays* 553). While modesty is clearly a quality he values highly, he does not discuss it here in relation to women in particular. Rather, they remain invisible as Hume discusses social advancement. In the included allegory he makes modesty female but also ascribes that gender to both wisdom and folly (*Essays* 555 - 56).

<sup>70</sup>The position of women in the salons of Enlightenment France was different but, though one of influence, it was by no means straightforwardly one of cultural power. See Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992). As Gutwirth notes: "The degree of the mixing of gender in French high society appears to be anomalous among European cultures. Women in the salons, the scene of mixed gender, achieve a species of status in terms of social representation unparalleled before or since, but [...] this statement requires massive qualification" (86). Madame de Pompadour enjoyed significant cultural influence. See Gutwirth 79 - 84. The potential influence which society women could possess through patronage is suggested by Lady Davenport in Maria Edgeworth's *Helen* (1834), introd. Maggie Gee, *Mothers of the Novel* (London: Pandora P, 1987), who discusses how an attempt to obtain the power enjoyed by French society hostesses almost brought about a separation with her husband. Gifted women such as Mme de Stael might perhaps find it possible to display their talents in the salon. However, Gutwirth writes: "Their seizure of a more aggressive role, whatever their personal gifts, might produce fierce criticism from others and inner torment in themselves" (87). That women in general in the salons formed the focal point around which males gathered to display their own taste and genius is suggested by Rousseau in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761); see *Eloisa, or a Series of Original Letters*, trans. William Kendrick (1803), 2 vols, *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789 - 1834. A Series of Facsimile Reprints* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989). In Kendrick's *Eloisa* St Preux remarks about Paris, "in most companies the lady of the house is seen alone amidst a circle of gentlemen, and this is so generally the case, that one cannot help wondering how such an unequal proportion of men can be every where assembled" (2: 113).

<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Gendered Concepts and Hume's Standard of Taste," in Brand and Korsmeyer 49 - 65, quoted from 55. Korsmeyer goes on to comment that much of the time this is implicit because Hume is considering those public areas of life into which women at that time hardly entered. However, when considering judgments of taste, even Hume was on occasion guilty of slipping unconsciously from speaking of women as aesthetic subjects to

aesthetic stance was available to women only intermittently, if at all, and, correspondingly, as many critics have noted, they often do not maintain the apparent detachment and neutrality such a position would require. For example, Bohls observes about Ann Radcliffe's *Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, Through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany* (1795) that "a pattern of disruption throughout the text strongly suggests resistance to the rational, neutral, and by implication universal aesthetic stance in which picturesque tourism participated," and similar observations have been made about Wollstonecraft's treatment of the sublime in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796).<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the debate over the standard of taste coincided with both discussions of the public role of art and the struggle to redefine civic virtue. The result was an attempt by some women writers to replace values associated with classicism by qualities often linked with the feminine. Hamilton provides an example of how feminine qualities could be made more critically central. Hamilton attempts to argue that qualities usually considered feminine are central to human worth. She uses associationist psychology not to support neoclassical criticism as Kames and Gerard had done, but to create a model of an arbiter of taste which is more open to women, and which has profound consequences for the lower ranks. Reynolds provides an example less complex and less successful than Hamilton's,

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considering them as aesthetic objects. Women's position, as Korsmeyer remarks, "oscillat[es]" between subject and object (63). Korsmeyer notes: "Women are ranked alongside works of art in this passage from the *Treatise* discussing the conversion of pleasure into pain through repetition: 'But when the fair sex, or music, or good cheer, or any thing, that naturally ought to be agreeable, becomes indifferent, it easily produces the opposite affection' " (Korsmeyer 55).

<sup>72</sup>Bohls 17; Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany, with a Return down the Rhine: To Which Are Added Observations during a Tour to the Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland* (London: Robinson, 1795), and Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark and Memoirs of the Author of "The Rights of Woman"* (1796, 1798), ed. Richard Holmes (London, Penguin, 1987). For resistance to detachment, see, for example, Jane Moore, "Plagiarism with a difference: Subjectivity in 'Kubla Khan' and *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*," in *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780 - 1832*, ed. Stephen Copley and John Whale (London, Routledge, 1992) 140 - 159. Moore discusses Wollstonecraft's description in the sixth chapter of a waterfall: "This moment of potential sublimity which is also one of sensibility produces disorder in the narrator's thought and vision" (151). She then comments: "The result is not so much a 'proper' sentence as a string of fragmented uncoordinated statements which resolve nothing" (151).

when she emphasises the importance of domestic experience in her *Enquiry*: “The cultivation of the social moral [sic] affections is the cultivation of taste, and the domestic sphere is the true and almost only one in which it can appear in its highest dignity” (36). A taste relying on “social” and “domestic” affections would be open to every socialised individual, but particularly accessible to women, who would be able to apply the standard.

However, Reynolds quickly retreats from this position, writing: “It is peculiarly appropriated to feminine taste, and I may say it is absolutely the only one in which it can appear in its true lustre” (Frances Reynolds 46). Reynolds’s indeterminate use of the pronoun here is typical of her style throughout and perhaps expresses her own unease with the subject position - she wishes to speak with authority and does, but avoids the consequences through a lack of grammatical clarity. In this case, however, the sentence could mean that the cultivation of social and moral affections (which Reynolds in any case defines as taste) “is peculiarly appropriated to feminine taste,” a tautology which places both domesticity and women in a central location in the discourse of aesthetics. Reynolds’s circumlocutory unease means, though, that this position is not maintained. A mere sentence later it appears that she is claiming, more conventionally, that proper ladies remain at home. It was left to the philosophically better-equipped Hamilton to make a sustained attempt to position the domestic at the centre of taste. In Hamilton’s work, the exercise of taste in the most humble of homes is important for national morale. However, the most determined novelistic adaptation of the notion of public virtue to the domestic realm is found in the later work of Jane Porter.

Despite its overt sexism, the language of taste thus became an important vehicle for women to debate the government and social structure of the nation. Women writers were important in the promotion of a native tradition of taste which allowed for the usually domestic rather than heroic conditions of life in Britain. This increased interest in national literary history and in the relationship between literature and history is reflected in the work of authors considered in this thesis,

who questioned what such relationships mean for those whose cultural expressions were low in status. The “gothick” literature of England’s past, dismissed by Addison, gained status in the 1740s and 50s (1: 124). Not only did a celebration of English heritage have nationalist appeal, but older works gained status by their apparent distance from the expanding literary marketplace – as Kramnick comments, “the earlier emphasis on decorous ease gave way to a re-evaluating of difficult obscurity”(28). The increased status of certain writers, particularly Edmund Spenser, was one notable result which the authors considered here utilised. Reeve’s *The Progress of Romance* (1785), for example, is a response to Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), which had re-valued Spenser in the light of the romance traditions.<sup>73</sup> In *The Progress of Romance* Reeve exploits the higher status of this literary past to give provenance for the novel and authority for the woman writer and critic. Her work testifies to her concern with tradition and hereditary values and in *The Progress of Romance* this concern is applied to literature. She is commonly preoccupied with the composition of society as well as intrigued by the relation between rank, taste and literary genre. Eventually, in *Destination* (1799) she updates gothic motifs, applying their emphasis on inheritance to the middle ranks of English society.

The very notion of national literary history engages the Lees. While in *The Progress of Romance* Reeve teasingly hints at the artifice of writing literary history, in *The Recess* (1783 - 85) Sophia Lee questions it more fundamentally.<sup>74</sup> As she shows how history is ruptured by sentiment, however, Sophia Lee simultaneously exploits the cultural glamour which literary history had come to associate with Elizabethan England.<sup>75</sup> She questions the possibility of disinterestedness in matters

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<sup>73</sup> Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries and Manners; With Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, on Them Respectively; In a Course of Evening Conversations*, 2 vols (Colchester: for the author by Keymer, [London]: Robinson, 1785).

<sup>74</sup> Sophia Lee, *The Recess; Or a Tale of Other Times* (1783 – 85), foreword J. M. S. Tompkins, introd. Devendra P. Varma, 3 vols, Gothic Novels (New York: Arno P, 1972).

<sup>75</sup> Attitudes to the reign of Elizabeth I were frequently contradictory. Thomas Warton wrote in his *History of English Poetry from the Twelfth to the Close of the Sixteenth Century*: “The age of Queen Elizabeth is commonly called the golden age of English poetry. It certainly may not improperly be styled the most poetical age of these annals” (4: 355). The romances



of taste and of history. In *The Canterbury Tales* (1797 - 1805) the Lees query the notion of a national literature.<sup>76</sup> Through their use of literary stereotypes they suggest the possibility of the literary canon and national history ignoring regional and social diversity and eliding the tales of the less powerful.

If the Lees were sceptical about the accurate writing of history, Hamilton was only interested in what it could demonstrate about human nature. Like the Lees, Hamilton emphasised the primacy of personal experience. However, her political position is complex. Her emphasis on associationist thought links her with Wollstonecraft and Hays, yet Hamilton employed a pedagogic associationist psychology, alongside Scottish common sense philosophy, in order to challenge scepticism and excessive sentiment. The first part of Chapter III examines her later interest in educational psychology and its effects on taste. The third chapter then traces this thought in her fiction and shows how Hamilton's resultant re-definitions of taste, the beautiful and the sublime are designed to provide a more constructive response to the debate of the 1790s than the parody for which she became better known.

Porter also entered into this struggle over the sublime and the beautiful, redefining them in terms not of power or weakness, nor of masculine and feminine, but in terms of the nationally generous and the selfishly private. The first part of Chapter IV examines and contextualises Porter's adaptation of the metamorphic power of female beauty and her redefinition of the sublime and the beautiful. The second part shows how she develops a notion of the enclosed sublime. The fourth chapter also explores how Porter gradually begins to refashion the notion of personal experience so that instead of being presented in the context of the association of

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associated with the Elizabethan age and the interest in chivalry believed to have been a feature of the period grew in status during the eighteenth century. However, the belief in a political system that permitted liberty and favoured cultural success was rather hard to link to Elizabeth's reign. For political undercurrents in Elizabethanism in the mid-century, see Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725 - 1742* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), particularly 150 - 84. For Sophia Lee the identity of Mary Queen of Scots was as important, as will be discussed in the second chapter of the thesis.

ideas, it is linked with the oral tradition. The issue of orality versus literacy had of course been rising in importance for some time. It had been brought to the fore with the Ossian controversy where Macpherson had argued in favour of oral sources and Percy had emphasised the value of the written.<sup>77</sup> The oral tradition gradually gained prestige and its cultural richness was emphasised by Owenson in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) as one of a number of ways of promoting sympathy between Ireland and England.<sup>78</sup> Porter's presentation of the oral is rather different, however. Her conception of oral culture encourages the individual to possess patriotic feelings as part of a larger community - and, though *The Scottish Chiefs* deals with a struggle between Scotland and England, it is a British community or even at times, a larger Christian community which Porter wishes to promote.<sup>79</sup> Oral tales and folk festivals retain some of their association with the periphery, but Porter comes to argue that their real significance is to represent the healing of political difference. Working with the notions of history painting held by the Royal Academy, Porter comes to present a type of heroism that does not rely on warfare or the kinds of deeds traditionally figured as heroic. The domestic day-to-day life of a Briton can also manifest patriotism.

Ultimately, while providing a detailed study of the work of its central authors, this thesis also aims to provide further evidence that the strands of thought selected by modern critics as the key to eighteenth-century aesthetics were under continual revision. Since such manipulation of aesthetic language was a way of gaining cultural prestige for certain groups and because there was such a keen sense of the

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<sup>76</sup>Harriet and Sophia Lee, *The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd ed, 5 vols (London: Robinson, 1799 - 1805); subsequently *C.T.*

<sup>77</sup>See Nick Groom, "Celts, Goths, and the Nature of the Literary Source," in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996) 275 - 98; see also Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996).

<sup>78</sup>Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: World's Classics-Oxford UP, 1999).

<sup>79</sup>Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs, a Romance* (1810), introd. Jane Porter, 2 vols, Standard Novels 7 - 8 (London: Colburn and Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Dublin: Cumming, 1831); subsequently *Chiefs*.

importance of literature and taste to matters of national identity, the debate was fierce.

## Chapter I

### Clara Reeve

#### i. Introduction

Re-examining the achievements of Clara Reeve forty-four years after the publication of her most famous novel, Walter Scott suggests that her “secluded life” must have limited her work:

it was scarce to be expected that the amiable and accomplished authoress, in her secluded situation, and with acquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone, should have rivalled those authors who gathered their knowledge of the human heart from having, like Fielding and Smollett, become acquainted, by sad experience, with each turn of ‘many-coloured life.’<sup>80</sup>

Scott is not primarily concerned with the author’s knowledge of the rules given by older literary (and frequently neoclassical) models. Instead, he is concerned with direct experience of human nature. In mentioning Fielding and Smollett, rather than Richardson, he suggests that Reeve lacks a certain kind of masculine experience. Richardson was considered particular suitable reading for women (Reeve’s character Hortensius, in *The Progress of Romance* describes him as “a writer all your own”) because of his depiction of sexual morality (1: 135). Fielding’s mixed characters were less suitable. Scott implies that Reeve lacks the sexual and emotional experience depicted in the picaresque novel. Similarly, Scott compares Reeve with Walpole, “who, as a statesman, a poet, and a man of the world ‘who knew the world

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<sup>80</sup>Sir Walter Scott, *Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists*, rev. ed., “Chandos” Classics (London: Warne; New York: Scribner, Welford and Armstrong, n.d.) 545 – 50, quoted from 549 – 50; subsequently *Lives*; see also Elizabeth R. Napier, “Clara Reeve (23 January 1729 – 3 December 1807),” *British Novelists, 1660 – 1800*, part 2, ed. Martin C. Battestin,

like a man,' has given much individual character to his sketch of Manfred" (*Lives* 550). Scott's repetition of "man" four times in twenty-six words reinforces the impression that masculine experience is of particular value. More unusual, however, is his inclusion of the word "statesman," with its requirement of professional political knowledge. Why measure Clara Reeve against such a standard? In using statesmanship as an unexpected yardstick of literary authority Scott in fact simultaneously recognises the political element in Reeve's work and denies her expertise, not even pausing to distinguish *The Progress of Romance* from Reeve's novels. Scott's omission is curious because *The Progress of Romance*, in its attempts to judge and select the work of the best writers, bears some similarity to his own endeavour, the prefaces to Ballantyne's *Novelist's Library* (1821 – 24).<sup>81</sup>

Scott's criticism of Reeve is in fact significant in terms of literary history both in its insistence on limitation and its downplaying of political content.<sup>82</sup> It is evocative of the kind of criticism Jane Austen received until the later part of the twentieth century, a criticism which for so long concentrated upon the apparent limitations of her world, upon the "little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory" on which she, with irony, described herself as working.<sup>83</sup> In his unsigned review of *Emma* (1816) in the *Quarterly Review*, dated October 1815 and issued for March 1816,

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*Dictionary of Literary Biography* vol. 39 (Detroit, MI: Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1985) 372 – 77.

<sup>81</sup>See Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone P, 1964); subsequently Johnston. He notes that Reeve's endeavour to write a history of fiction places her firmly within a tradition begun by Huet (57). He also cites James Beattie and Clara Reeve, who "summarized existing opinions and concluded sensibly that 'Romances are of universal growth' " (Johnston 57 - 8). In this, Reeve resembles John Moore and Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld who also begin their histories "with summaries of the various theories of the origin of romance" (Johnston 58).

<sup>82</sup>The continuing effect of Scott's criticism is evident in James Trainer's introduction to *The Old English Baron*. Trainer shows a similar eagerness to turn to Reeve's apparently narrow experience for an explanation: "No doubt her fear of change and moral decay stemmed from the narrowness and isolation of her own existence for she seems to have travelled but little and to have had few companions" (*O.E.B.* xiv). Trainer does not suggest a source for this material, though Scott makes a similar observation (*Lives* 546).

<sup>83</sup>Jane Austen, *Selected Letters 1796 – 1817*, ed. R. W. Chapman (1955), introd. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 189. For a discussion of this question, see for example, Donald Greene, "Jane Austen and the Myth of Limitation," *Jane Austen Today*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975) 142 – 75.

Scott did not concentrate his criticism of Austen upon her omissions.<sup>84</sup> He did, however, mention that the “author confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society,” while the “narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks.”<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, his discussion of Reeve and to a certain extent, of Radcliffe, reflects the nineteenth-century tendency to focus criticism of women’s writing upon its omissions.<sup>86</sup> The political context and content of such writing by women, often at any rate disguised in the discourse of taste, was ignored or underplayed.

Despite Scott’s discomfort, his biography of Reeve demonstrates that the female arbiter of taste is also a political figure:

In a letter to a friend, Miss Reeve thus speaks of her father: - “My father was an old Whig; from him I have learned all that I know; he was my oracle; he used to make me read the Parliamentary debates, while he smoked his pipe after supper. I gaped and yawned over them at the time, but, unawares to myself, they fixed my principles once and for ever. He made me read Rapin’s ‘History of England;’ the information it gave, made amends for its dryness. I read ‘Cato’s Letters,’ by Trenchard and Gordon; I read the Greek and Roman Histories, and ‘Plutarch’s Lives:’ - all these at an age when few people of either sex can read their names.” (*Lives* 545)

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<sup>84</sup>B. C. Southam, ed. *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge; New York: Barnes, 1968) 58 - 69.

<sup>85</sup>64; in the same unsigned review of *Emma*, Scott suggests: “Upon the whole, the turn of this author’s novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape. It is neither so captivating as the one, nor so grand as the other, but it affords to those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience of their own social habits” (Southam 68). In Scott’s account, Austen’s *Emma* presents neither polished beauty nor sublimity; it cannot be allied with either the ambitious masculine nor the captivating feminine. His criticism here is not, then, explicitly gendered. However, it allies Austen’s work with the diminutive (“cottages”) and the utilitarian. It is not hard to see how a criticism of limitation might arise out of such comments.

<sup>86</sup>Scott remarked that the tenor of Radcliffe’s life “seems to have been peculiarly calm and sequestered. She probably declined the sort of personal notoriety, which, in London society, usually attaches to persons of literary merit, and perhaps no author whose works were so universally read and admired, was so little personally known even to the most active of that class of people of distinction, who rest their peculiar pretensions to fashion upon the selection of literary society” (*Lives* 561 - 62).

Reeve's insistence on the extent of her education and its classical aspects suggests an attempt to establish literary authority. Her education is in fact reminiscent of a passage from Vicesimus Knox's *Essays Moral and Literary* (1779), "On the Insensibility of the Men to the Charms of a Female Mind," where a young lady describes her lessons in Latin and Greek.<sup>87</sup> Reeve may not have learnt Greek but her education, like that of Knox's young lady, was atypical in inclusion of the classics.<sup>88</sup> Reeve's account of her childhood also, however, has a pronounced political content. In describing her father as an "old Whig" Reeve is indicating that, rather than supporting a brand of whiggism allied to court or commercial interests, her father was more idealistic about the nature of political power. The term "old Whig" was originally used to denote those Whigs who became disenchanted with the means Walpole took to maintain political power. Such Whigs objected in particular to Walpole's closeness to the court, which was perceived to weaken an English liberty that originated in the dim past with the Goths, Anglo-Saxons or Normans. The label remained in use until after the War of American Independence, signifying a desire for a primitivist political purity, reflected in the reading matter of Reeve's father. Paul Rapin de Thoyras wrote the *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1724 – 1727), which was translated into English by Nicholas Tindal between 1723 and 1732.<sup>89</sup> Rapin de Thoyras's *Histoire* was, according to Bridget Hill in *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian* (1992), "acknowledged to be by far the best history that appeared in the first half of the century," and assumed by

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<sup>87</sup>Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary* (1779), Vivien Jones, *Women* 106 – 109.

<sup>88</sup>Additionally, Vicesimus Knox's young lady is the "only daughter of a clergyman" (Vivien Jones, *Women* 106). Reeve demonstrates a variant on Knox's model. She was the daughter of Reverend William Reeve, MA, Rector of Freston, and of Kerton in Suffolk, and Perpetual Curate of Saint Nicholas, Ipswich, but Scott notes that because of the size of Reeve's family (seven brothers and sisters), it must have been "rather Clara's strong natural turn for study, than any degree of exclusive care which his partiality bestowed, which enabled her to acquire such a stock of early information" (*Lives* 545). See also Miriam Leranbaum, "'Mistresses of Orthodoxy': Education in the Lives and Writings of Late Eighteenth-Century English Women Writers," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 121 (1977): 281 - 301.

<sup>89</sup>Paul Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England. Written in French by Mr Rapin de Thoyras. Translated into English with Additional Notes by N. Tindal*, trans. N. Tindal, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols (London: Knapton, 1732 – 33).

Hume to be whiggish in sympathy.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the Old Whig rhetoric in favour of an ancient constitution within which core liberties balance kingship bore similarities to Reeve's outlook. Reeve had a profound respect for rank and its maintenance but also sanctioned a sturdy independence that was irrespective of rank. This notion of forthright self-respect has its roots in the Old Whiggish insistence on common liberties granted by tradition. For Reeve, clearly delineated ranks and primogeniture do not have to be accompanied with servility. Clear social divisions are, according to Reeve, an insurance against such behaviour, and this view that constitutes an important difference between her and the radicals of the 1790s.

The issues raised by the authors whom Reeve mentions became relevant to later political debates. *Cato's Letters*, for example, was an opposition journal run by John Trenchard, the title of which refers to Cato the Censor who had criticised Rome's luxury and corruption. Its effects were long lasting. In his study *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600 – 1800* (1999) Kidd writes: "*Cato's letters* had indoctrinated many Americans into a radical critique of English whig complacency."<sup>91</sup> Trenchard had also warned against the threat which standing armies posed to English liberties, a warning which was to be repeated by supporters of the American and French Revolutions, including Wollstonecraft, almost a century later.<sup>92</sup> By mentioning it, Reeve is alerting her correspondent to an interest in such debates about maintaining a balance of powers within the state.

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<sup>90</sup> Bridget Hill, *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992), 26 – 7. Hill also comments: "Although not all seventeenth-century history written in the eighteenth century was clearly Tory or Whig in sympathy, it tended to be claimed by one side or the other and became actively used in the battle of party politics. This was particularly true of David Hume (1711 – 76). Although Rapin's history was not uncritically Whig, it was as a Whig historian that he came to be attacked by Hume. When the first volume of his *History of England* (1754 – 62) appeared, Hume had been an admirer of Rapin but later admiration turned to scorn" (29).

<sup>91</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 266.

<sup>92</sup> See [Walter Moyle and John Trenchard], *An Argument, Shewing, that a Standing Army Is Inconsistent with a Free Government, and Absolutely Destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy*, 1697 (Exeter: Rota at the U of Exeter, 1971).



Reeve's self-portrait indicates that she wishes to be seen as a reader whose values are informed by a combination of morality and politics. She emphasises that in politics moral feeling can and should be dominant and she promotes this through romance. Her vision contrasts with the professional lawyers and law givers who, persistently in Scott's writing (and most notably in *Redgauntlet* [1824]), replace more romantic and monarchical figures. This indicates that, in using the word "statesman," Scott's strategy is more complex than to unfairly criticise Reeve for lacking a professionalism never available to her. He is indicating that a moral, unprofessional approach to community government (often associated in his fiction with female figures from the romance tradition) is defunct. Scott's stance reflects the change in the rhetorical associations of romance that had taken place since the French Revolution. For Reeve such traditions had different associations and thus in *The Progress of Romance* she used them to promote the female aesthetic subject and to place women in a better position to guide the nation's reading habits. Following Reeve's lead, this introduction aims to show how "political" interest in the broadest sense constituted a part of Reeve's literary persona. An increased awareness of this project enables a new appreciation of Reeve's appropriation of literary authority and use of romance in *The Progress*.

Reeve's interest in the moral health of the nation was little in evidence in her first collection of poetry, *Original Poems on Several Occasions*. Written in the 1750s and published in 1769 under the initials "C. R.", this collection suggests that Reeve's early adventures in the literary marketplace were not particularly encouraging.<sup>93</sup> With her next endeavour, a translation of Barclay's *Argenis* from Latin, renamed *The Phoenix; or the History of Polyarchus and Argenis* (1772), Reeve's fascination with romance as a vehicle for politics becomes visible.<sup>94</sup> In the preface to *The Phoenix* she describes it as a "romance, an allegory, and a system of politics. In it the various forms of government are investigated, the causes of faction

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<sup>93</sup>Clara Reeve, *Original Poems on Several Occasions* [as C. R.] (London: printed by Pasham for Harris, 1769); subsequently *Original Poems*.

detected, and the remedies pointed out for most of the evils that can arise in a state” (n.pag.). Her belief in the value of Barclay's *Argenis* to government is also suggested in *The Progress of Romance*, when her character, Euphrasia, complains about the poor reception of *The Phoenix*:

Euph. [. . .] I wish it had been abridged much more, and that I had only told the plain narrative, and omitted all the fine Essays, (the most valuable part of the work,) and the poetry also; it had saved me much time and labour, and would have pleased more readers. (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 85)

To Reeve the worth of the essays seems to be their political and moral content but, even after the publication of the book, she was unconvinced that her audience would agree. She decided that the romance should be published “UNDER the appearance of a novel” (Preface n.pag.). However, the disguise worked too well. Despite the suggestion of rebirth in the title “The Phoenix,” and the statement in the preface that the work was a translation, Reeve was attacked by the critics, who claimed she had tried to pass it off as an original work (*The Progress of Romance* 1: 82). Such critics must have been very inattentive indeed, for on the very first page of her preface Reeve apologises “for prefixing a new name to a book, that is indeed only a translation of BARCLAY’S ARGENIS . . . .” (n.pag.).

Five years later Reeve published what Scott called “her first and most distinguished work [. . .] upon which the fame of the author may be considered as now exclusively rested” (*Lives* 545 - 46). This was initially entitled “*The Champion of Virtue. A Gothic Story*” (1777), written by “The Editor of the Phoenix,” but in 1778 another edition, with a preface, was brought out entitled *The Old English Baron*.<sup>95</sup> As she had with *The Phoenix*, Reeve suggested in the preface that the work was related to both the romance and the novel. It was an attempt to “unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern Novel,

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<sup>94</sup>Clara Reeve, trans. *The Phoenix; Or, the History of Polyarchis and Argenis. Trans. from the Latin by a Lady*, 4 vols (London: Bell; York: Etherington, 1772).

at the same time it assumes a character and manner of its own, that differs from both; it is distinguished by the appellation of a Gothic Story” (*O.E.B.* 3). Furthermore, she remarks that it was written in response to the defects of Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764), where “the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite” (*O.E.B.* 4).<sup>96</sup> Given that Horace Walpole was the son of the politician viewed so suspiciously by the old Whigs, it would be surprising if Reeve’s novel did not differ politically from his.

Walpole’s own novel is explicit, though playfully so, concerning the political implications of romance. Its subtitle “A Gothic Story” (which it shares with *The Champion of Virtue*) refers both to antiquarian interests and to the gothic tradition of political commentary which enjoyed considerable popularity during the late seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century. This “gothic” view of English history argued that British constitutional freedoms stemmed from the Teutonic peoples and had once been common throughout Europe. In this political myth, other European nations had gradually succumbed to arbitrary monarchy, and some of the myth’s adherents believed that the 1688 Revolution might ultimately send England in the same direction. Therefore, the romance associated with this gothic version of history was connected to a narrative in which political liberty coexisted with kingship. This strain of political rhetoric was employed by the Jacobites in order to gain credit with disaffected Whigs. The Jacobites suggested that the divinely sanctioned rule of the Stuarts had been supplanted with an arbitrary monarchy likely to threaten ancient English constitutional liberties. Such rhetoric was close to that of the old Whigs.<sup>97</sup> Reeve may have encountered it. Walpole certainly had. Many of

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<sup>95</sup> Clara Reeve, *The Champion of Virtue. A Gothic Story* (Colchester: Keymer; London: Robinson, 1777).

<sup>96</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), ed. W. S. Lewis, notes Joseph W. Reed, Jr (1964; Oxford: World’s Classics-Oxford UP, 1982).

<sup>97</sup> See Paul Kléber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People 1688 – 1788* (Cambridge UP, 1989). Monod remarks: “The intellectual and rhetorical mutations of the ‘Whiggish’ Jacobites were typical of many disillusioned radicals of the 1690s. William’s refusal to sponsor further reform, and the emergence of the Court or Junto Whigs as the dominant element in the party, drove numerous ‘old Whigs’, like Sir Robert Harley, towards a Country alliance which could accommodate both Tory scruples about the sanctity of monarchy and

his fellow antiquarians were Jacobites, a matter of amusement for Walpole when writing to Richard Bentley in September 1753. Walpole remarked that “my love of abbeys shall not make me hate the Reformation till that makes me grow a Jacobite like the rest of my antiquarian predecessors” (*Walpole's Correspondence* 35: 146). The subtitle of Walpole's novel is a witty allusion to the tradition of political rhetoric which looked to an ancient source for constitutional purity. In this context Walpole's tale of an usurping family who hold power for two generations before being threatened by the rightful heir appears suspiciously close to the drama of Jacobitism. The heroism of its central character, Theodore, for example, is typical of a romance hero but the immediacy with which his nobility can be perceived is reminiscent of the way in which Charles Edward Stuart's exploits, after the '45, were mythologised. As Monod notes, his actions “were popularized in works like *Alexis; or, The Young Adventurer, Ascanius and Young Juba*. Like the ‘Persian Letter’, these fabulous accounts attributed Bonnie Prince Charlie with a magical personal charm” (37 – 38). Theodore himself, however, is unusually passive for a romance hero. His actions are provoked by those of the usurper, and his passivity suggests the “divinely ordained cycle of events” which was to lead to the Stuart restoration and which “required no human intervention” (Monod 54). Similarly, the giant suit of armour, a symbol of rightful rule, contrasts with the humanity and potential vulnerability of Theodore, the true heir, as the body of the Stuart heir as divinely ordained contrasted with his human form.

The suit of armour, however, was more risible than threatening and as a comment on the transfer of power Reeve seems to have felt that the trope lacked gravitas. Reeve wished to correct the scale of the fantasy in *The Castle of Otranto*; her “plan” was that the “keeping, as in painting,” might be preserved – her ambiguous reference to “keeping” invites the assumption that social as well as topographic perspective is at issue (*O.E.B.* 5). Reeve's preference for England

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Whig concerns for the rights of the subject. To a large extent, the ‘Whiggish’ Jacobite polemicists passed from Whiggery to Jacobitism over the bridge of Country principles” (27).

rather than Walpole's Italy and her decision to alter the title also point to an intention to discuss England's constitutional past in a more sober manner. Her use of romance tales connected with Britain has been noted by Ann Kasee Clifton Laster in her unpublished thesis, "Rhetoric and Romance: Tradition and Parody in the Work of Clara Reeve," though the significance of this in terms of Reeve's relation to Walpole is not explored.<sup>98</sup> Laster comments upon similarities between the story of the conception of King Arthur and that of Edmund, the hero of the novel, and argues that Reeve is providing a Christian rewriting of the myth. In fact, she claims that the parallels between Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and *The Old English Baron* are much stronger than those between Walpole and Reeve (148 – 49). However, this is because Reeve's novel, far from paralleling Walpole's work, rewrites it, treating the transfer of authority in a way which she would argue was more responsible. For example, much Stuart rhetoric tried to combine the argument of divinely sanctioned kingship with the notion that constitutional freedoms, threatened under the Hanoverians, would be safe in their hands. However, while in *The Castle of Otranto* Theodore's peasant upbringing offers the vague hope that he will be a ruler who respects his subjects, in *The Old English Baron* Reeve sketches a more complicated and precise distribution of power. The rule of her hero, Edmund, whose name recalls the 'gothic' land of the pre-Norman kings, is sanctioned not merely by his birth or by supernatural signs, but also by an independent legal system. The Old Whiggish determination to invest power in legislation as well as in kingship is in evidence.

Such seriousness failed to impress Walpole, however, who wrote to Robert Jephson on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> January 1780 that *The Old English Baron* "had scarce any incidents; and though it condemned the marvellous, admitted a ghost - I suppose the author thought a tame ghost might come within the limits of probability."<sup>99</sup> In fact, Reeve's anxiety about the correct transfer of power had left no room for the vagaries

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<sup>98</sup>See Ann Kasee Clifton Laster, "Rhetoric and Romance: Tradition and Parody in the Work of Clara Reeve," diss. U of Georgia, 1999, particularly 148 – 49.

of *The Castle of Otranto*. This is indicated by Barbauld's description of *The Old English Baron* as a novel of a "moderate degree of merit," in which the "chief fault [. . .] is, that we foresee the conclusion before we have read twenty pages" (*British Novelists* 22: i – ii). More recent critical debate has been kinder. For example, in contrast to Scott's earlier criticism that, despite attempted probability, Reeve's use of local colouring was scanty, Varma in *The Gothic Flame* (1957) says that Reeve "presents a more definite picture of feudalism: besides the historical colouring of Henry VI's times, there is a spectacular scene of mediaeval challenge of which the details are carefully adjusted to historical usage."<sup>100</sup> Varma's mention of Reeve's interest in feudalism is significant since it was the relative purity of "gothic" modes of government with which Reeve was concerned.

After *The Old English Baron* Reeve's interest in the consequences of education for the social structure became much greater. This was in line with the growing interest in education shown by many of her contemporaries in the period after the War of American Independence and it is first shown in her 1783 novel, *The Two Mentors*. Examining both birth and education as sources of authority, she depicts the struggles of the hero, Edward Saville, between the choices of clergyman or rake offered by his two guides. The novel reads interestingly alongside Burney's *Cecilia* (1782), where the heiress heroine has been given three guardians, all of

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<sup>99</sup>Walpole's *Correspondence* 41: 410; Scott similarly found attempts to ensure the story's probability led to tedium (*Lives* 545 – 50).

<sup>100</sup>Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences* (London: Barker, 1957), 74. In *Mothers of the Novel*, Spender suggests Reeve's matter of fact approach was beneficial but less accurately, she also adds: "What was frightening, mysterious, unknown, could (later) be plausibly explained" (232). In fact, while later novels such as *The Recess* show how the supernatural can be explained away, in *The Old English Baron* supernatural effects are not rationalised, but deliberately left to endorse an existing patriarchal order. The ghosts that appear are the hero's father and mother, warning him of the treachery which has been practised to disinherit him. This is similar to the role of the supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto*, but in Walpole's work the effect of the scale of the fantasy is to distract from the ideology. Spender is not the only critic to fail to make this distinction. See, for example, Jerry C. Beasley, "Life's Episodes: Story and its Form in the Eighteenth Century," *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues P, 1988) 21 – 45, in particular 37.

whom are flawed and potentially threatening.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, *The Two Mentors* focuses attention on the male heir, suggesting that the dangers he faces are rather different from those of an heiress. She is in constant danger of being robbed or threatened; her major choice, the selection of a husband, removes her inheritance from her control.<sup>102</sup> Edward's dilemma, on the other hand, is not how to escape the machinations of his fortune-hungry mentors, but to choose a course to follow through life.

In 1785 Reeve published *The Progress of Romance*, which combined her interest in education with her fascination, previously shown in the preface to *The Old English Baron*, with the history of romance and the novel. In *The Progress* Euphrasia, the female guide, gives an education in both and implies that such knowledge is essential to the health of the nation. Though the study is scarcely mentioned in Scott's *Lives*, it has considerable significance. Reeve's *Progress* is often, if usually briefly, mentioned when critics consider the changing definition of the literary form of the novel.<sup>103</sup>

The work is divided into two volumes, and begins with a preface in which Reeve defines her project of tracing the origin of romance, exploring its initial relationship with the epic, and linking it to the novel. She then uses twelve conversations, recalling the format of the epic. These conversations are between the largely neutral Sophronia, representing the female romance reader; the initially

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<sup>101</sup>Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), eds. Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody, introd. Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988); subsequently *Cecilia*.

<sup>102</sup>For a brief discussion of the role of Cecilia and Burney's two other early heroines, as opposed to Juliet in *The Wanderer*, see Rose Marie Cutting's article, "Defiant Women, The Growth of Feminism in Fanny Burney's Novels," *Studies in English Literature 1500 - 1900* 17 (1977): 519 - 30. In particular, Cutting draws attention to the way in which Cecilia's inheritance fails to secure her independence (521). For earlier examples of women who combined the roles of author and critic, see the Folger Collective.

<sup>103</sup>See, for example, Ioan Williams, ed. *Novel and Romance 1700 - 1800: A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge, 1970). Williams notes: "Clara Reeve also published a work which is of considerable interest for criticism of the novel in the eighteenth century - *The Progress of Romance*," and explains he has not included it partly because of its form, its republication, and because it "is not strikingly original in the quality or manner of its critical judgments" (298). For a later brief acknowledgment of Reeve's contribution, see James P. Carson, "Enlightenment, Popular Culture, and Gothic Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 255 - 76, particularly 258 - 59.

hostile, classically educated Hortensius “into whose character,” Reeve comments, “I have thrown all such observations as are not properly my own,” and the scholarly Euphrasia (*Progress* 1: v). Euphrasia in fact claims Reeve’s publication of Barclay’s *Argenis*, so any distance between her and Reeve is slight (1: 85). The characters outline the project before moving on to examine the origins of romance in the second and third conversations, then examining the later Romances and the use of prose. In the fifth and sixth they deal with modern romance, including that of Queen Elizabeth’s court. The second half of the epic structure is marked by the consideration of the differences between the romance and the novel and the discussion of Behn, Manley and Haywood. The next discussion considers French novels and discusses the English tradition of Richardson and Fielding. The second volume, containing the last four conversations, further classifies modern works. Here Reeve’s judgments become briefer, causing one critic to comment: “In many respects, this history is little more than a catalogue.”<sup>104</sup> However, it is in the second volume that the effect that Romances, novels and other writings may have on youth is discussed at length. A conclusion is reached very like that in the Preface to *The Old English Baron* - Reeve writes: “I confess that [Romance] may be abused, and become an instrument to corrupt the manners and morals of mankind,” and adds, “so may every kind of composition; but that will prove nothing more than the old saying lately revived by the philosophers the most in fashion, ‘that every earthly thing has two handles’ ” (*Progress* 2: 96 - 97). Reeve then includes a short list of reading material suitable for children. She also appends “The History of Charoba, Queen of Ægypt.”

*The Progress of Romance* is significant because of the multiple parts which Euphrasia assumes within it. Though adopting some of the conventional rhetoric of an eighteenth century woman writer, she both assumes the role of aesthetic subject and suggests the social importance of creating individuals who are capable

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<sup>104</sup> “*The Progress of Romance, through Times, Countries, and Manners*. Two volumes. 8 vo. 5s. sewed. Robinson,” Rev. of *The Progress of Romance*, by Clara Reeve, *The Critical*



of making aesthetic judgments. An education, presumably one which fixes the “principles once and for ever,” creates not only judicious readers but wise citizens, Reeve suggests (Scott, *Lives* 545).

Reeve’s concern with education and inheritance as routes to authority continues in her later works. Her novel *The Exiles: or, Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt* (1788) describes a marriage between different social classes.<sup>105</sup> While the resultant difference in education is to some extent minimised by industrious actions of the lower class wife, a still more significant difficulty is that the marriage has to be kept secret if the husband is not to be disinherited. In 1791 Reeve published *The School for Widows: A Novel*, where the themes of education and inheritance are further developed.<sup>106</sup> In it the two heroines are shown to be more capable than their late husbands were. Mrs Strictland manages her late husband’s property far more efficiently than he had, but significantly she is prevented from remarrying by a clause in his will, stating that if she marries again, the property and care of her son will be passed to someone else. Mrs Darnford’s husband, far from being parsimonious like Mr Strictland, demonstrates what happens if one fritters away one’s inheritance in attempting to belong to a higher social class. In order to support herself, Mrs Darnford founds a school. Mrs Darnford is also employed in Reeve’s *Plans of Education; With Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers. In a Series of Letters Between Mrs Darnford and Her Friends* (1792).<sup>107</sup>

In 1793 Reeve published *Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon, the Natural Son of Edward Prince of Wales, Commonly Called the Black Prince, with Anecdotes of*

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*Review: Or, Annals of Literature. By a Society of Gentlemen* 60 (1785): 54 – 59, quoted from 56; subsequently *Rev. Progress, Critical Review*.

<sup>105</sup>Clara Reeve, *The Exiles; Or, Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt*, 3 vols (London: Hookham, 1788); subsequently *Exiles*.

<sup>106</sup>Clara Reeve, *The School for Widows. A Novel*, 3 vols (London: Hookham, Harrison and Miller, 1791); subsequently *School*.

<sup>107</sup>Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education; With Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers. In a Series of Letters between Mrs Darnford and Her Friends* (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1792).

*Many Other Eminent Persons of the Fourteenth Century*.<sup>108</sup> Of this Barbauld commented in her preface to the 1810 *British Novelists* reprint of *The Old English Baron* that “she has shown a good deal of reading, and has exhibited all that could be met with of the ceremonies and usages of the splendid reign of Edward the Third, joined to that high sense of virtue supposed to belong to the chivalrous times, but for which they are entirely indebted to the writers of romance” (22: ii – iii). Again, the idealisation of feudalism and the chivalric system indicates Reeve’s Old Whig reading material as a child.

In 1799 Reeve published *Destination: Or, Memoirs of a Private Family* which Brophy notes, “virtually ignores women and concerns itself solely with the education of boys.”<sup>109</sup> Brophy highlights a potential problem for feminists reading Reeve’s work which also occurs in *The Two Mentors*; however it is the case that *The School for Widows and Plans of Education* are far more concerned with women. Rather than indicating a shift in Reeve’s sense of priorities, then, *Destination*’s concentration on men may indicate Reeve’s belief that the education of women and men should take place separately; in one of her favourite educational works, *Adelaide and Theodore*, by Madame de Genlis, the brother and sister spend most of their time being instructed apart, though within the family home.<sup>110</sup>

In addition, *Destination* significantly develops Reeve’s interest in inheritance and history. As the final section of this chapter explores, the novel demonstrates how the issues which concerned Reeve in *The Progress of Romance* continued to be of interest to her even when placed in other contexts. In *Destination*, educated members of the middle orders, in particular those capable of running schools, and those who become merchants, are effected by issues of authority, inheritance and origin.

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<sup>108</sup> Clara Reeve, *Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon, the Natural Son of Edward Prince of Wales, Commonly Called the Black Prince; With Anecdotes of Many Other Eminent Persons of the Fourteenth Century*, 3 vols (London: Hookham and Carpenter, 1793).

<sup>109</sup> Clara Reeve, *Destination: Or, Memoirs of a Private Family*, 3 vols (London: Longman and Rees, 1799); subsequently *Destination*; and Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Women’s Lives and the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century English Novel* (Tampa, FL: U of South Florida P, 1991), 254.

<sup>110</sup> [Madame la Comtesse de Genlis], *Adelaide and Theodore; Or Letters on Education: Containing All the Principles Relative to Three Different Plans of Education; To That of*

*Destination* is Reeve's attempt to rehabilitate romance for the middle classes. The first section of the chapter examines her initial use of romance to promote political idealism and strengthen the position of the female reader, writer and critic but it also sketches subsequent shifts in the associations of romance. *Destination*, as the second section shows, is Reeve's attempt to compensate for the changing meaning of romance.

## ii. Romance and the female aesthetic subject

“By detailing the potential good and danger inherent in the reading of novels, and by assigning to women the duty of discriminating proper texts, Reeve makes a serious argument in favour of female critical authority,” Runge comments in *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660 – 1790* (160). While Runge notes the skill with which Reeve uses moral conduct to promote female critical authority, she pays little attention either to Reeve’s competitors in romance criticism or to the broader historical context in which Reeve was canon-making. Reeve’s work reflects the increasing interest in the late eighteenth century in cataloguing and constructing canons across various art forms. Johnson’s *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets* appeared between 1779 and 1781 and were first collected together in 1781.<sup>111</sup> Warton’s *History of English Poetry* (1779 - 81) had recently been published. Reynolds’s *Discourses on Art* (1769 - 90) was a review and classification of the different genres of art and artists, and, though international in its scope, was national in its intentions. This section aims to demonstrate how Reeve, having assessed the difficulties of claiming literary authority through a classical tradition, shrewdly chose a moment when a national canon of romance was under construction. Using the roles offered by romance criticism, Reeve attempted to increase the authority of women as arbiters of taste. Exploiting romance’s association with issues of political liberty, she also gave women a central role in her distinctly political moral vision.

The context of Reeve’s work is the construction of a national canon. This is indicated by the remarks of the critic in *The Monthly Review*:

If Hurd, Beattie, Warton, and Percy (whose names reflect the highest lustre on modern literature), did not regard the subject of these little volumes as unworthy of their research, no one need blush at devoting

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<sup>111</sup>Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (1781), 2 vols, Everyman (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, n.d.).

some portion of time in pursuit of the same enquiry: nor can that be deemed undeserving the notice and protection of the Public, to which the practice of a Sydney hath given sanction, and which hath received the approbation of a Milton.<sup>112</sup>

The writers and the critics of romance mentioned by the reviewer were associated with the promotion of a national tradition of literature. In line with this is the reviewer's failure to mention Pierre Daniel Huet, who, in *A Treatise of Romances and Their Original* (1672), had stated the superior quality of the French romance.<sup>113</sup> This was challenged by Richard Hurd and James Beattie and their work, like that of Warton and Percy, reflected a growing interest in native trends in literature. However, the reviewer's use of the conditional gives his remarks a tentative quality and this indicates the precarious nature of this tradition at this point. Hurd, Beattie and Percy had some critical authority but the status of the subject on which they wrote was still fluctuating. Furthermore, though they had each shown a particular interest in forms related to metrical and prose romances, there was some disagreement as to the nature of romance and its most prestigious forms.

Reeve's choice of the topic therefore shows immense shrewdness. She was discussing a potential canon which had enough prestige to be taken seriously and yet was still flexible enough to be manipulated. She was writing about a type of literature related to the reading of women but which as yet remained open to re-evaluation. Reeve's involvement in the issues of "female power and reader identification" in *The Progress of Romance* has been noted but this chapter will demonstrate how Reeve manipulated the roles available to women within romance

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<sup>112</sup>See, for example, "Art. II. 'Progress of Romance' by C.R.," rev. of *The Progress of Romance. The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, Enlarged* 73 (1785): 414 – 18, in particular 414; subsequently Rev. *Progress, Monthly Review*.

<sup>113</sup>[Pierre Daniel] Huet, *A Treatise of Romances and Their Original: Translated out of French* (London: Heyrick, 1672). Huet describes it as "truly a subject of wonder," that, despite the loss of the "Bayes for Epick Poesie and History, we have carried these to so high a pitch, that the best of their Romances do not equal the very meanest of ours" (103).

and its criticism.<sup>114</sup> It will show that Reeve's project had political implications and will demonstrate how disputes over the rhetoric of romance during the 1790s prevented the imagery working in the way Reeve imagined.

Reeve's strategy of employing the different voices allowed women by the romance tradition followed her realisation of the heterosexual assumptions behind women's oscillating aesthetic position.<sup>115</sup> In *Original Poems* she had expressed her sense of this obstacle to claiming literary authority through an instability in tone. Her poem, "To my Friend Mrs. - . On her holding an Argument in Favour of the Natural Equality of both the Sexes. Written in the Year MDCCLVI," suggests the ease with which she can be misread. Significantly, this instability of voice occurs within a framework of classical reference in which the speaker gives what appear to be clear indications of an anti-feminist stance. Employing commonplace descriptions of womanhood, she mentions the "weak brains of our soft sex" and alleges that women's writing is "superficial" while men's has "weight and energy." The almost misogynistic tone Reeve adopts is reminiscent of the attacks on women by Pope and Swift. However, when considering the classical narrative of literary authority Reeve suggests that a gendered aesthetic naturalises the absence of women from the canon:

Not every one can write that chuses

But those invited by the Muses:

These are nine wit-inspiring lasses,

Who dwell about the hill Parnassus.

She continues with Apollo who:

Teaches these girls polite behaviours,

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<sup>114</sup>Ros Ballaster, "Romancing the Novel: Gender and Genre in Early Theories of Narrative," *Living by the Pen: Early British Women Writers*, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Teachers College P, 1992) 188 – 200, quoted from 193.

<sup>115</sup>See J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770 – 1800* (London: Methuen, 1932), where the survival of such assumptions is evident in her assessment of the restraining effects of modesty upon Reeve: "Diffidence was the only wear, but it did not suit all the women equally well" (118). Tompkins places her authors as aesthetic objects rather than subjects at the very moment of their creative act; correspondingly, Reeve's failure to

For which they grant him certain favours:

(But modest ones you may be sure,

For they are virgins chaste and pure.)

Despite the tongue-in-cheek primness of Reeve's denial, there is a hint of sexual collusion here, deepened when Reeve adds:

[. . .] - The ancients tell us,

These nymphs were always fond of fellows;

For by their records it is clear,

Few women ever have been there.

Thus the respect which Reeve appeared to possess for the classical tradition (as implied by the "sacred Heliconian spring") quickly gives way. Instead, the gender relation set up between poets and muses is depicted as imaginative pandering. The male poets' dependency on female favour emasculates them and they become affected by the kind of "oscillation" women writers are subject to – they are no longer aesthetic subjects but objects. However, Reeve's reduction also demonstrates that the fantasy of a heterosexual dynamic between "fellow" and muse naturalises the absence of women poets. She continues to argue for the possibility of successful female poets by referring to philosophy:

Exceptions to all gen'ral rules,

Are still'd [sic] allow'd of in the schools:

And Phoebus's favours to the fair<sup>116</sup>

Are not impossible, tho' rare

These more hopeful comments on the possibility of female genius sit strangely with the sentiments of the first part of the poem, and demand critical re-evaluation.

Re-examining those initial portraits of masculine and feminine abilities, the possibility opens that their extreme conventionality is not conservatism or lack of originality on Reeve's part, but the reverse - the ridicule of the stereotype.

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conform is not seen as a challenging expansion of the role of the female aesthetic subject, but as a failure in sexual attractiveness.

Additionally, in her conclusion she describes her pain at being mocked for writing poetry and adds:

For what in man is most respected,

In woman's form shall be rejected.

Reeve has adopted, then subverted the conventional descriptions of womanhood. Unfortunately, in a circumstance which highlights the difficulty of editing poetry for an anthology, Reeve's elusivity was not captured by Lonsdale's edition of eighteenth-century women poets.<sup>117</sup> Notably, the anthology omits large sections of the poem, including the sections in praise of female poets, and the sections expressing the dubiousness of the patriarchal poetic tradition. To appreciate the way in which Reeve manipulates the conventional to explore the possibility of female genius, it is at the moment necessary to consult a contemporary edition.

In "To my Friend Mrs. -" Reeve indicates both that Parnassus is a peculiarly difficult hill for a woman to climb and that the barrier is one of physical "form." Later in her career she turned to different tradition, the romance, which allowed a greater degree of metamorphosis – the disguises offered by the romance tradition might make the female body less of a handicap. It is Markman Ellis in the *Politics of Sensibility* who, while discussing sentiment, comes closest to describing the multi-vocal nature of Reeve's relationship to literary authority.<sup>118</sup> He notes that "Reeve's criticism is leisured, educated and academic, but also feminine, provincial and unprofessional" (Ellis 202). In fact, Reeve's criticism in *The Progress of Romance* contains multiple voices and not just those of the dialogue. *The Progress* capitalises on the roles provided for females in romance and its criticism.<sup>119</sup> During

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<sup>116</sup>The incorrect scansion here appears in the edition of the poems used.

<sup>117</sup>Roger Lonsdale, ed. *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 247 – 50, see esp. 248 - 49.

<sup>118</sup>Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>119</sup>In her recent study *The Romantic Paradox: Love, Violence and the Uses of Romance 1760 – 1830* (Basingstoke : Macmillan, 2000) Jacqueline Labbe briefly notes that Euphrasia is cast by Hortensius in the role of enchantress and takes the position of knight; see in particular 21 and 23; this point is not, however, developed and Labbe argues, "Euphrasia refuses the usual roles offered by the romance, those of victim or villain" (21). In fact, the



the course of its conversations, *The Progress of Romance* exploits the growing status of romance literature and criticism to move the battle for literary authority from “Parnassus” through Europe to England.

Reeve’s use of the military combativeness to assist her “educated and academic progress,” for example, has been noted by several commentators but the way this relates to the criticism of romance has received less attention (Ellis 202). Military imagery, romance and women had been associated by Huet, who explains the talent of the French writers of Romance by detailing the freedom of the French women. These women, “being under no custody, but that of their own Heart, make thereof a Fort more strong and sure [. . .] The Men hereby are obliged to lay a formall Siege to this Fort” (104). For Hurd, however, military imagery is not used as amatory metaphor. Instead, stressing the martial character of feudal societies and the prevailing atmosphere of “Ambition, interest, glory,” Hurd depicts a “military fanaticism” so strong that women too were involved: “For instance, one of the strangest circumstances in those books, and which looks most like a mere extravagance of the imagination, is that of the women-warriors, with which they all abound [. . .]” (Hurd, *Letters* 11, 12). However, he assures the reader that “in this representation they did but copy the manners of the times” (Hurd, *Letters* 12). Reeve draws on the martial imagery of romance alongside the dialogue form to place Hortensius in the position of challenger:

Hort. What Madam, do you think you can give a challenge, and go off with impunity? - I am come hither to demand an explanation of your behaviour last Thursday evening at *Sophronia*’s house; and I have brought her with me to be a witness to our dispute - of the defeat of one of us, - or perhaps of our compromise, and reconciliation.

Soph. Or that *Euphrasia* shall make a convert to her own opinion.

(Reeve, *Progress* 1: 1)

The abruptness of Hortensius's address "What Madam," his choice of the words "challenge" and "behaviour," and his decision to bring a witness, make these opening words close to a formal challenge for a duel. In this combativeness there is an amatory subtext, but this is scarcely developed later. More obviously, Hortensius's persistent use of warlike imagery hints that the realm of literary criticism is conventionally a masculine one, concerned with force and competition. His words suggest that by intruding into it, Euphrasia has forfeited the protection the female role affords. Hortensius's position as opponent thus appears to force Euphrasia to adopt the unconventional position of scholar.

Reeve shows a similar combative willingness to take on academic trappings. This is noticeable in her preface to *The Progress of Romance* where she examines the treatment other writers have given the subject and, in highlighting their deficiencies, outlines her own project. She comments that other writers have said a great deal about "metrical Romances" but in their treatment of prose romances "their informations have been scanty and imperfect" (Reeve, *Progress* 1: v). She also explains her use of the dialogue form and applies dictionary definitions (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 12). Her scholarliness compares interestingly with Hurd's. In Reeve's work it is most ostentatious in her introduction, yet the first few of Hurd's letters are the most relaxed. "Nothing in human nature, my dear friend, is without its reasons," he says (*Letters* 1). Similarly calm when he imagines his correspondent enquiring after the source of his information, he refers him to the 20<sup>th</sup> volume "of the *Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres*" with a swift urbanity that reveals almost nothing.<sup>120</sup> Reeve's eagerness to distinguish herself from unscholarly work, on the other hand, is an early indication of the importance of precedence (either literary or political) to her schema.

The second representation of women in romance which Reeve exploits is linked with chivalry. The emphasis placed on it in discussions of romance is

indicated by Hurd, who mentions it a few pages after his description of the martial woman, and without any acknowledgement of contradiction. He describes the gallantry which “would take a refined turn, not only from the necessity there was of maintaining the strict forms of decorum, amidst a promiscuous conversation under the eye of the Prince and in his own family; but also from the inflamed sense they must needs have of the frequent outrages committed, by their neighbouring clans of adversaries, on the honour of the Sex” (Hurd, *Letters* 17 - 18). Continuing with a suggestion of the dangers of “Violations of chastity,” he portrays female virtue as “the fairest and strongest claim of the sex itself to such protection” (Hurd, *Letters* 18). Euphrasia’s confessions of weakness, and her emphasis upon her femininity cater to such expectations of womanhood. Euphrasia is intermittently humble, frequently suggesting her own deficiencies. She notes that the difficulty of the enterprise may prove too much for her - “my materials increase upon me,” she claims, emphasising her femininity with a metaphor reminiscent of pregnancy (*Progress* 1: 9). She is also careful to state that her knowledge has boundaries. “I venerate *Homer* as much as one unlearned in his own language can do,” she insists, indicating her awareness of the debate over the propriety of female students of Greek and Latin (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 19). Similarly, Reeve has a protection for her modesty in Euphrasia, whose remarks on the *Argenis* indicate her closeness in identity to the author.

The voices given her feminine critic by Reeve have correlatives in both the version of the history of romance given by Hurd and in the romance he praises so highly, *The Faerie Queene* (1590 – 1596). Euphrasia’s use of modesty is comparable to the femininity of Florimell, while the combative aspects of Reeve’s Euphrasia have a precedent in the English tradition of romance in Spenser’s Britomart, patriotic, valiant, and disguised as a man. Britomart and her double, the more feminine Florimell are solutions to the problem of presenting the Queen as

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<sup>120</sup>Hurd, *Letters* 25; for a discussion of Hurd’s sources see Victor M. Hamm, “A Seventeenth-Century French Source for Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*,” *PMLA*

both ruler and woman. Reeve's tactics suggest such doubling is necessary not just to present queens in romance but for women in literary life.

Romance criticism also drew on a third role for women, that of guide. As Una led the Red Crosse Knight in the first canto of *The Faerie Queene*, Euphrasia leads Hortensius through the landscape of romance. Her name, "Euphrasia," is close to "euphrasy," a substance used to brighten the eyes, and also once thought good for vision; if "Una" possessed the holy singleness that could correct her knight's course, Euphrasia has vision, a quality perhaps more appropriate for a guide in an empiricist age. Euphrasia's assumption of the role of female guide, with its precedent in romance, aids her somewhat unconventional position as aesthetic subject and critic. For Hurd, as will be seen, this had potentially dark implications – women were Duessa-like enchantresses, leading knights astray. Beattie's descriptions in "On Fable and Romance," however, indicate that Reeve was drawing upon a tradition in which the authority of women was established.<sup>121</sup> Describing the characters of the Teutonic peoples from whom, he argues, feudalism and, eventually, by extension, chivalry and romance took their origin, he notes:

A third peculiarity in the character of these people is, their attention to their women. With us, the two sexes associate together, and mutually improve and polish one another: but in Rome and Greece they lived separate; and the condition of the female was little better than slavery; as it still is, and has been from very early times, in many parts of Asia, and in European and African Turkey. But the Gothick warriors were in all their expeditions attended by their wives; whom they regarded as friends and faithful counsellors, and frequently as sacred persons, by whom the gods were pleased to communicate their will to mankind. (*Philosophical and Critical Works* 2: 525 – 27)

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52 (1937): 820 – 28.

<sup>121</sup>James Beattie, *The Philosophical and Critical Works of James Beattie*, 2 vols (Hildesheim: Olms, 1974) ; see particularly *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783), "On Fable and Romance" (2: 503 - 574); subsequently *Philosophical and Critical Works*.

Reeve attempts, via Euphrasia, to develop a model of co-operation between female and male critic that resembles this behaviour rather than either the more aggressive or weaker models. Euphrasia asks Hortensius for help, “since you have opened my mouth upon the subject, you are bound in honour to correct my redundancies” (*Progress* 1: 9). He replies: “What to furnish you with weapons for my defeat?” “Not so, but to assist me in the course of my progress through the land of Romance,” Euphrasia explains (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 9). Refusing to subscribe to Hortensius’s combative, masculine methods of criticism, Euphrasia chooses a form of aesthetic judgment which is a nonaggressive, collaborative process. Her metaphors are not of territorial conquest or acquisitive imperialism. Rather, in figuring her judgment of literature as a journey through the “land of romance,” she allies the acts of criticism and scenic tourism. In her tour she will use the sense, eyesight, which Addison thought most important for the imagination. Indeed, the act of imaginatively viewing, Addison suggested in the four hundred and eleventh edition of *The Spectator*, removed the need for actual possession (3: 395 - 96).

The female guide in romance tradition does, however, have a darker side, of which Spenser’s Duessa may serve as an example. “Like a faire Lady, but did fowle *Duessa* hyde,” the female may be an enchantress, leading the knight astray.<sup>122</sup> It is this which Hurd presents as his third role for women in romance: “The oppressions, which it was the glory of the Knight to avenge, were frequently carried on, as we are told, by *the charms and enchantments of women*” (*Letters* 33). It is also, incidentally, this use of stratagem, rather than violence, which Northrop Frye associates with romance in *The Secular Scripture* (1976).<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, this is a role which Reeve herself refers to, though she distances it from the main text. In her appended story “The History of Charoba, Queen of Ægypt” Charoba first uses trickery to make Abraham and Sarah accept riches from her. However, she also employs trickery to defend herself, an act the outwitted Gebirus might well see as

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<sup>122</sup>Edmund Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, introd. E. De Selincourt (1912; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), 13, 1. 2. 35.

somewhat Duessa-like. Operating with the force Frye sees as typical of the epic, Gebirus threatens to invade Charoba's country unless she marries him. However, like Penelope, Charoba refuses to let him dictate the genre. She uses the advice of her nurse to trick Gebirus, and the only weakness in her plan occurs when a sea nymph, tricked by Gebirus, gives him information on their tactics. Nevertheless, Charoba is ultimately successful and establishes a female dynasty. Charoba's actions make her a version of the romance enchantress, with her power stemming from knowledge she inherited from the female side. This story of female inheritance and power seems even more significant in the light of Reeve's praise of Madame de Genlis's *Adelaide and Theodore*. Barbauld remarked of the work that the parent: "the mother rather, must dispose of her daughter; the daughter must be passive; and the great happiness of her life, is to be the having in her turn a daughter, in whose affections *she* is to be the prime object" (*The British Novelists* 1: 27). Barbauld finds it overstrained, but Reeve makes numerous references to it, both in *The Progress* and in other works.<sup>124</sup> Her female dynasty, however, is founded on knowledge handed from mother to child, as opposed to concentrating on the disposal of daughters.

Charoba maintains female authority through strategy and enchantment and Reeve, in her portrait of Euphrasia, suggests that such a romance enchantress or guide can be read as offering strategies to critical authority for women. When Euphrasia, for example, suggests that the passion for old Romance still exists, she reinforces her statement with evidence supplied by her friend, who, while living in Naples, had heard old stories recited. Hortensius comments: "Whenever I think to catch you tripping, you glide away from me, and in your place I find another person, whom I am to contend with" (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 61). His expression evokes the magical qualities of metamorphosis and exchange which characters can possess in romance. Despite Hortensius's eagerness to ascribe such qualities to

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<sup>123</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (London: Harvard UP, 1976), 71 - 72.

Euphrasia, however, it is not so much duplicity as scholarly cunning which Euphrasia is applying here: "I can only fortify my opinions, by others more respectable," Euphrasia says (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 61). Similarly, in Reeve's *The School for Widows* Mrs Darnford uses historical evidence to defend herself. Mrs Darnford is asked by Lord A- to become his mistress (54). He offers her not only a firm monetary agreement, given with all the financial detail so characteristic of Reeve, but a set of historical and classical precedents (54). Mrs Darnford refuses, protecting herself not with outraged morality but more surprisingly, by refuting his examples in best scholarly style (Reeve, *School* 54). The kind of historical reading Reeve did as a child is here presented as a practical defence mechanism.<sup>125</sup>

Reeve is suggesting that a woman can maintain a position of authority by well-informed cunning. Such deception results in a greater control over property, both physical and intellectual. Indeed, Reeve seems to be inviting the reader to make a parallel between Charoba and herself. Like Charoba, she uses certain strategies against the threatening criticisms of the establishment in the form of Hortensius. Like Charoba, she leaves an inheritance, in this case a reading list of "Books for Children" and "Books for Young Ladies" and a potential canon including women writers (2: 102 – 103). However, Reeve is extremely careful in this teasing coda. The message about inheritance is presented in a fictional form, separate from the main text and given as an ancient example of romance. Reeve is also protected by the fact that it is not even the heroine, Charoba, who has the deceitful ideas, but her nurse. This is a wry suggestion of the power of female

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<sup>124</sup> See, for example, *Progress* 2: 99; *The School for Widows* 2: 8.

<sup>125</sup> However, Reeve does not condone all uses of authority; careless acceptance of received opinion is frowned upon. A few lines after Euphrasia has exploited her friend's evidence, Hortensius demonstrates another way of using authority. He asks: "But what are those [Romances] of which I had formed so contemptible an opinion?" to which Euphrasia replies: "Ah *Hortensius*! - have I not caught you tripping? - Have you suffered yourself to form a contemptible opinion of books you never knew, nor enquired after?" (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 62). Hortensius uses the opinions of others as a substitute for firsthand enquiry; instead of travelling for himself, he is content to read the guidebooks. He chooses those whom he thinks most likely to be truthful, but this is a dangerous strategy. Nevertheless, Euphrasia is unwilling to blame Hortensius and warns him to judge for himself in future - "do not part with [this opinion] till you see good reason for it," she tells him (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 62).

educators and it also shelters Reeve, who remains safe behind numerous disclaimers.

Reeve's use of the marginal spaces of her critical text, her suggestion that fiction and criticism overlap, even her examination of gendered constructs and indication that they can be removed by well-intentioned trickery all express her belief in the imaginative side of criticism. She almost immediately emphasises the creative process and need for personal judgement that she believes is involved in criticism. Hortensius, when challenging Euphrasia to prove her position, says: "In the course of our late conversation, you threw out several hints that struck me as either *new*, or *uncommon*, in respect to the works of the ancient and modern writers" (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 2). Hortensius is echoing Addison who suggests that one source of aesthetic pleasure is generated by novelty: "Everything that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination [. . .] It serves us for a kind of refreshment, and takes off from that satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary entertainments" (3: 398). Hortensius is therefore placing himself in the position of spectator, while Euphrasia becomes creator. In this role, she stresses the distorting effect of prejudice and popular opinion, "perhaps I only seemed to degrade your favourites, and exalt the others, because I opposed opinions long received, and but little examined; while in reality I only meant to place each in their proper rank, both as to merit and utility" (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 3). As the words "rank," "merit" and "utility" suggest, she does not envisage imagination working within an ethical and social context.

Reeve is attempting to work within literary tradition by using the roles it offers in a creative way. While the significance Reeve places on tradition is distinct from Wollstonecraft's thought in the area, the emphasis Reeve places on a degree of independent aesthetic judgment provides an unexpected point of contact between their thought. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft's reply to men's complaints of the "follies and caprices of our sex" is to ask them to "Behold, [. . .] the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only



prejudice to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force" (*Political Writings* 84). She argues that independent thought is necessary to preserve virtue, while Reeve shows it is necessary to form and keep valid aesthetic judgments. Without this direct experience and use of reason, both virtue and aesthetic judgment can be swept away. However, while Wollstonecraft suggests it is women who are not allowed to judge independently, Reeve shows a man whose vision has been distorted by prejudice. Her character, Hortensius, moves from his first, combative, egotistical position to one of participation in the debate, making observations from his own experience. Moreover, he is led down this path by a woman. This reverses the convention of the male lover and tutor, who guides the female to better aesthetic judgments, as Henry Tilney tries to do with Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* (1818).<sup>126</sup> The role of guide assumed by females in romance makes this reversal easier for Reeve to perform, suggesting one reason why romance is an appropriate genre for her to defend. Reeve's *Progress of Romance* encourages women to see themselves as critics when they study romances, rather than portraying them as idle individuals reading worthless books.

The strongest argument for working creatively within tradition is offered by Reeve in her re-examination of romance and the epic in *The Progress*. As both Runge and Ballaster have noted, Reeve's work attacks the existence of the gendered aesthetic which suggested that while women read the popular, lower status romance, men concentrated on the superior epic. In particular, Reeve suggests that romance has the same roots as epic and that the two are not readily distinguishable (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 14).<sup>127</sup> She also highlights the similarities between epic and romance by

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<sup>126</sup> Jane Austen, *Novels* vol. 5; see, for example, Henry's advice on "the picturesque" in the landscape around Bath (5: 111).

<sup>127</sup> The critics' attitudes to Reeve's suggestion of the similarity of epic and romance varied. That the reviewer of *The Monthly* mentions the precedents set in this area (Hurd, Beattie, Warton and Percy) suggests he may have had some familiarity with the version of literary history which connected romance and epic (Rev. *Progress*, *Monthly Review* 414). In contrast, the writer for the sixtieth volume of *The Critical Review* seems much vaguer about the existence of other literature in the area, and is much more hostile to the notion of similarity between romance and the epic. This reviewer is determined to categorise the

beginning *in media res*, by using extended martial metaphors and by dividing her book into twelve. Furthermore, Reeve links the denigration of romance with the denigration of women: “Others having seen a few of the worst or dullest among them, have judged of all the rest by them; - just as some men affect to despise our sex, because they have only conversed with the worst part of it” (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 112). By equating the vilification of romance with ignorance and corruption, Reeve restores not only herself but women to the position of full aesthetic subject. To finally redress the balance, Reeve also emphasises that young men as well as young women encounter danger through their reading material. Euphrasia points out the dangers of schoolboys reading certain parts of Virgil or imbibing Greek prejudices and idolatry along with Greek thought (Reeve, *Progress* 2: 80). Thus Reeve’s *Progress of Romance* seeks to establish, not only the origin of romance, but the equal ability and equal dangers which face men and women in judging art.

Reeve’s promotion of romance and emphasis on a moral framework of literary value have received critical attention. In addition, however, her use of the roles of romance enabled her to insist on the rationality and morality of new, previously feminised groups of readers. This has received little critical attention, as have the political implications of her position. Having reconsidered aesthetic worth and reopened the canon, Reeve was able to challenge the status of groups of readers whose alleged liking for debased forms of fiction had led to them being considered ill-judging aesthetic subjects. She begins the process in the first volume, where, for example, Sophronia refers to her mother’s and aunt’s habits of gathering to read fiction aloud (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 69). Ballaster comments: “This picture of communal reading activity on the part of women is somewhat nostalgic; consumption of the emergent novel appears to have been a solitary and intimate reading experience carried out in the *boudoir*,” and as Wollstonecraft’s portrait of Mary’s mother indicates, such novel reading was sexualised and connected with

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romance as inferior: “We allow that there is often a striking resemblance between works of high and low estimation; but the resemblance is in some trifling parts” (Rev. *Progress*,

French influence (Ballaster 191; Wollstonecraft, *Works* 1: 8). Reeve's public reading, on the other hand, replaces the erotic novel reading that was associated with the French, with the portrait of a rational community.

In the second volume new groups of aesthetic subjects really begin to proliferate when Hortensius tells a brief anecdote about the custom of reading Eastern tales in Turkey. A traveller in search of antiquities who had embarked on the enterprise against the advice of his friends, was having difficulties:

His patron rallied him upon his want of resolution, and asked him if he had not yet learned the Turkish method of calming his mind? - The traveller thought he meant the use of opium or some drug of that kind, but he soon after called for a young man his servant, and ordered him to take up a book and read where he left off the night before. (Reeve, *Progress* 2: 61)

Hortensius explains that a "pleasant story" was read:

to which the traveller was attentive, and found his mind relieved and comforted. - When the lad had done reading, his master raised many questions, and made remarks upon the story, and then spoke to his guest as follows: - "You see my friend, that we are not such Barbarians as many of the Franks believe us" [. . .] "it is as natural and as innocent as gaming, or drinking great quantities of wine, which are your common diversions." (Reeve, *Progress* 2: 62 - 63).

This anecdote is particularly significant because the Turks were more frequently treated as aesthetic objects than subjects, as Elizabeth Bohls suggests in her book *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*. Discussing Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, Bohls comments that "late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century British and French accounts of travel to the Ottoman Empire are consistent with later representations of the Middle East. The Orient is discursively feminized and eroticized; West stands to East in a relation of proto-colonial

domination that takes on a seemingly inevitable sexual character” (Bohls 27 - 8).

Bohls’s remarks are verified by an examination of treatments of the East in the work of other romance critics. Beattie, for example, writes, presumably about the Middle East:

When an Eastern prince happens to be idle, as he commonly is, and at a loss for expedients to kill the time, he commands his Grand Visir, or his favourite, to tell him stories. Being ignorant, and consequently credulous; having no passion for moral improvement, and little knowledge of nature; he does not desire, that they should be probable, or of an instructive tendency: it is enough if they be astonishing.

*(Philosophical and Critical Works 2: 509)*

Further feminised, his prince is also impressed with “rich robes, gaudy furniture, sumptuous entertainments, and palaces shining in gold, or sparkling with diamonds” *(Philosophical and Critical Works 2: 509)*. In other words, Beattie’s prince has the kind of indiscriminating attachment to the material and bodily which was often associated with women *(Philosophical and Critical Works 2: 509)*. Huet’s attitude to the Eastern inventors of such tales had been even more scornful. Early on he remarks that the Orient was the source of romances which were improved by the Greeks (16). He later comments:

that the Histories of the people of the East are stult with lies, and are in no wise faithful or exact, and that it is most probable they have been Fabulous in speaking of the Author and Original of Fables, as well as in all the rest; and that the *Greeks* are more diligent, and of better credit, both in their Chronology and History . . . . (18)

Reeve introduces, then subverts such common perceptions. Her traveller’s assumption that the Turk will use “opium” is drawn from stereotypical portraits of the East and suggests that the Occidental image of the Orient is one of a place of languor. Additionally, the presence of the young man might be a sly reference to notions of homoeroticism or effeminacy. However, the boy and the older man have

the relationship of pupil to teacher. This, like the relationship between Charoba and her nurse, is another example of Reeve connecting an apparently feminized relationship with the inheritance of knowledge. In contrast, the taste of the solitary traveller is questionable. His mission to gather antiquities suggests a colonial and acquisitional attitude and has been conducted in defiance of his parents.

Reeve's attitude to this form of tourism and aesthetic appreciation is not dissimilar to Montagu's whose "scorn of traditional, masculine modes of travel," Bohls indicates, "is more explicit in her later letters" (25). Reeve's disapproval is not explicitly stated but it can be deduced from the circumstances of the youth's travel and his cultural assumptions. He has acted against advice in going to Turkey; his complete, unruly and unprofitable independence is contrasted with the independence of thought, the reasoned discussion which the Turk carries out when considering the written words of others. Reeve is suggesting a division between the independence of wilfulness and the reasoned position of the aesthetic subject. She is insisting that we broaden our idea of who can be aesthetic subjects. Later, in *Destination*, she will develop this theme further. Here, however, one major function of the tale is to stress Hortensius's development. His act of narration demonstrates that his conversations with Euphrasia have enabled him not only to reassess the canon, but to reassess his ideas on aesthetic subjects.

Hortensius's discovery of aesthetic subjecthood in those whose taste is conventionally undervalued, is then emphasised by another example from Euphrasia. She describes the observations of M. de Guys in his *Sentimental Journey through Greece*, saying: "When a party of women met together they frequently entertained each other with telling a story in turn, which amusement is called *Paramythia*" (Reeve, *Progress* 2: 64). The argument of *The Progress of Romance* in general, and Hortensius's anecdote in particular, has re-contextualised such women, allowing the girls at needlework the status of aesthetic subjects. By filling Greece not with heroic males, but with reading women Reeve has once again challenged the classical tradition

Reeve, then, has used romance to provide a number of new roles for women as literary critics. She has also consistently emphasised the romance tradition at the expense of the classical tradition. Correspondingly, she has stressed the talent of women (and, as a displaced form of the same observation, the romancers of the East) as aesthetic subjects. Reeve's overall point is, however, political. In *The Progress of Romance* Reeve suggests that fashion, langour and general corruption have spread in England in the previous one hundred years, or, in other words, since around the time of the Glorious Revolution. Throughout *The Progress of Romance* she has worked to deny that there is any necessary connection between this moral and political decline and both romance and femininity. Instead, Reeve wishes romance to be used as a way of reversing the corruption. The feminised, moral community of romance readers pictured by Reeve is a way of achieving this aim.

The political significance of Reeve's comments on romance does not become clear until the last conversation. It opens with Euphrasia and Sophronia walking outside because, according to Sophronia, extensive study has damaged her friend's health. Hortensius commends such exercise, remarking:

No people are born too tender to endure their own climate, - it is indulgence and luxury that effeminates us, and then we complain of our country, and fly to others to recover what we have lost by our own fault.

(2: 75 – 76)

Hortensius then notes that the Britons have altered since Julius Caesar to which Euphrasia replies: "The Britons are not more altered in this, than in all other respects – their manners, - their customs, - their amusements" (2:76). The remarks of both Euphrasia and Hortensius promote a notion of native hardiness which should be preserved but is gradually being eroded. More than this, however, Euphrasia remarks that this change has been particularly noticeable over the previous hundred years. She dates the beginning of commercial corruption in England to the time of the Glorious Revolution.

Reeve's comments can be viewed in terms of the political discussion which was linked with romance criticism. Richard Hurd, writer of the *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, for example, had a stake in those debates on government which were particularly concerned with how the constitution had developed over time. In his chapter "Whose ancient constitution? Ethnicity and the English Past" Colin Kidd defines seven main ways in which the ancient English past was reshaped according to various ideological imperatives. Hurd's position best corresponds to the fourth which Kidd outlines, which is as follows:

Some antiquarians conceded that the irruption of Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans had inevitably wrought changes in England's institutions and laws; however, these alterations were superficial. Underlying a surface history of arrival, settlement and change was a deeper-laid pattern of common institutional forms, whether through limitations on monarchy, or through legal continuity within a shared framework of custom and precedent. That blending of peoples did not disturb the basic principles of English government. (80)

Importantly, it is Richard Hurd's *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1759) that he gives as an example.

Reeve's comments suggest an awareness of this political tradition (also debated in romance criticism).<sup>128</sup> Hortensius's and Euphrasia's remarks invoke a certain nostalgia for a hardier gothic past and locate this past before the Glorious

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<sup>128</sup> While Hurd viewed the principles of English government as essentially unchanged, in "On Fable and Romance" James Beattie uses elements of this view and of a more gothicist view of English history. In part, he suggests a common gothic heritage for Europe. The actions of the northern peoples in invading Europe had ultimately ensured certain constitutional liberties. He writes: "Another thing remarkable in the Gothick nations, was an invincible spirit of liberty" (2: 527). He continues: "To them [gothic institutions] there is reason to believe that we are indebted for those two great establishments, which form the basis of British freedom, a parliament for making laws, and juries for trying criminals, and deciding differences" (2: 527). Though this sounds as if such freedoms might have existed in pre-Norman Britain, Beattie then qualifies his position by suggesting that gothic institutions produced feudalism and: "The feudal system, in its full extent, was not brought into England, till the Conquest by William Duke of Normandy; who imported it from his own country, where it had been long established; and introduced it into the southern part of this island, with the consent of the Great Council of the Nation" (2: 534). This mention of the "Great Council" allows Beattie to suggest an older system developing, rather than an abrupt break with the past.

Revolution in a way compatible with Old Whiggish beliefs. Reeve's main political move is a similarly compatible insistence on the importance of morality to government. This becomes explicit a few pages later when a much reformed Hortensius comments that showing scenes of corrupt life to young people is detrimental and hopes that amendment will occur in the future:

Oh England, model to thy inward greatness  
Like a little body with a mighty heart;  
What might'st thou do, that wou'd thee honour do  
Were all thy children kind and natural?<sup>129</sup>

This quotation from Henry V (II. I. 16 – 20), ascribed by Reeve simply to "SHAKESPEARE," comes at a point in the play when three English supporters are found to be in conspiracy with France. It thus emphasises the importance of the political morality which Reeve has insisted can be promoted through properly chosen novels and romances.

The romance had been a vehicle for constitutional propaganda. However, Reeve's very anxiety to connect it with native hardiness indicates that she saw the potential for romance (and femininity) to become strongly associated with political as well as moral corruption. Reeve's fears proved correct. The romance tradition came to be viewed with suspicion in the 1790s both by women writers in their search for critical authority and by radical politicians. The connection between romance and political decay, already latent in *The Progress of Romance*, became more evident. For this Edmund Burke's emphasis on constitutional heritage was indirectly responsible. Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* was read by commentators as using romance imagery to support the preservation of ancient tradition for its own sake (rather than because it was connected with any ancient

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<sup>129</sup>*Progress of Romance* 2: 91; William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. J. H. Walter, Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1954), II. I. 16 – 20; in this edition reads as follows: "O England! Model to thy inward greatness,/ Like a little body with a mighty heart,/ What might'st thou do, that honour would thee do,/ Were all thy children kind and natural!"



political purity). For example, on the matter of preserving “the venerable vestiges of ancient days” Wollstonecraft comments:

These are gothic notions of beauty – the ivy is beautiful, but, when it insidiously destroys the trunk from which it receives support, who would not grub it up?

Further, that we ought cautiously to remain for ever in frozen inactivity, because a thaw, whilst it nourishes the soil, spreads a temporary inundation; and the fear of risking any personal present convenience should prevent a struggle for the most estimable advantages. (*Political Writings* 8)

Wollstonecraft’s imagery here implies that Burke’s support for ancient traditions is the result of an aesthetic choice rather than a desire for political purity. Thus gothic imagery is no longer connected with a tradition of public integrity, but with outdated and impractical political views.

In particular, Burke’s chivalric rhetoric was extensively criticised. Wollstonecraft associated such chivalry with moral weakness and she believed it damaging to politicians, soldiers and women alike. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), for example, she comments:

To endeavour to reason love out of the world, would be to out Quixote Cervantes, and equally offend against common sense; but an endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone superior powers, or to usurp the sceptre which the understanding should ever coolly wield, appears less wild. (*Political Writings* 93)

Wollstonecraft’s use of Don Quixote associates the older and newer meanings of the word “romance,” the literary form and erotic love. Wollstonecraft suggests that to attempt to banish the latter would be to fall into the absurd idealism of the former. Her real concern, however, is what romantic love and romance share – the tendency

to award power for the wrong reasons. Chivalry casts women in the role of aesthetic (or sexual) objects and as such, according to Wollstonecraft, makes them weak tricksters, who gain power through deception.

Wollstonecraft's response to Burke's *Reflections* used some of the most complicated and sustained imagery against the different aspects of romance but other critics of Burke also capitalised on his use of gallantry by parodying its supposed values. Leading dissenter and academic Joseph Priestley wrote in his *Letters to the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1791, that Burke's prejudices on religion were hardly surprising given his "similar suspension of [his] *reason*," and that he was "equally under the power of *imagination*, in [his] views of the principles of *civil government*":

Such, Sir, is "your proud submission, and the subordination of your very heart," to *princes*, and *nobles*; such your devotion to *rank* and *sex*, in conjunction with your *religious enthusiasm*, that one might suspect that your book was composed after some solemn vigil, such as watching your arms at the shrine of the blessed virgin; after which you issued forth the champion, in form, of religion, of monarchy, and of the immaculate virtue of all handsome queens . . . .<sup>130</sup>

Two months later James Mackintosh, a liberal Whig whose moderate reply to Burke was much admired, used chivalric language to suggest that Burke's beliefs were whimsical and outdated. In *Vindiciae Gallicae. Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers, against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (1791) Mackintosh wrote:

Crusades were an effervescence of chivalry, and the modern St. Francis has a knight for the conduct of these crusaders, who will convince Mr. Burke, that the age of chivalry is not past, nor the glory of Europe gone

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<sup>130</sup>Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, Occasioned by His Reflectionson the Revolution in France* (1791), in *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution*

for ever. The Comte d'Artois, that scyon worthy of Henry the Great, the rival of the Bayards and Sidneys, the new model of French Knighthood, is to issue from Turin with ten thousand cavaliers to deliver the peerless and immaculate Antonietta of Austria from the durance vile in which she has so long been immured in the Thuilleries, from the swords of the discourteous knights of Paris, and the spells of the sable wizards of democracy . . . .<sup>131</sup>

Mackintosh's satire on the gothic is connected with comment on constitutional theory; for him, adherence to the gothic means adherence to the "*fortuitous Governments*" that developed in the past (*Burke, Paine, Godwin* 91). "To suppose the social order is not capable of improvement from the progress of the human understanding, is to betray the inconsistent absurdity of an arrogant confidence in our attainments, and an abject distrust of our powers," he argues, supporting the right to correct a constitution (*Burke, Paine, Godwin* 91). Those who opposed Burke used such a strong strain of anti-romance rhetoric, and placed such emphasis on reason, that those further to the right became extremely cautious as to how they used the imagery of romance when discussing it in terms of the English constitution. Instead, using the rhetoric of romance against the radicals, conservatives often blamed the romance in its more modern sense of love story, and in particular *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, for contaminating young women. Such women were allegedly tainted with immorality and revolutionary philosophy to their ruin and to the detriment of society.

In particular, it became unpopular amongst women writers to use the language of romance in the way that Reeve had done, that is, as a strategy to broaden the number of routes to critical authority open to women. An episode in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) illustrates the point. After arguing with her friend, Lady

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*Controversy*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 83 – 89, quoted from 87; the collection is subsequently referred to as *Burke, Paine, Godwin*.

<sup>131</sup> James Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae. Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers, against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (1791), in Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin* 90 – 95, quoted from 93.

Delacourt, Belinda goes to stay with the Percivals. While there, Lady Delacourt's enemy, the female politician and cross-dresser, Harriot Freke, attempts to take her away:

I swore to set the distressed damsel free, in spite of all the dragons in Christendom – So let me carry you off in triumph in my unicorn, and leave these good people to stare when they come home from their sober walk, and find you gone. There's nothing I like so much as to make *good* people stare – I hope you're of my way o'thinking – You don't look as if you were though – but I never mind young ladies' looks – always give the lie to their thoughts. – Now we talk o'looks – Never saw you look so well in my life – as handsome as an angel! [. . . .]

Belinda, who had not been suffered to utter a word whilst Mrs Freke ran on in this strange manner, looked in unfeigned astonishment; but when she found herself seized and dragged towards the door, she drew back with a degree of gentle firmness that equally astonished Mrs. Freke. With a smiling countenance, but a steady tone, she said, “that she was sorry Mrs Freke's knight-errantry should not be exerted in a better cause, for that she was neither a prisoner, nor a distressed damsel.” (212 – 213)

Edgeworth has made the point, so clearly comprehended by Reeve, that while chivalry may be disempowering for women, it is possible for a female to claim within it a more masculine or knightly role. However, Harriot's speech indicates in no uncertain terms that both roles are inadequate. Her misogyny demonstrates that the alleged power of beauty is illusory, while her poor syntax and ill-disciplined associations suggest the mental laxity of such chivalric patterns of thought.

Edgeworth has associated this knight errantry with a female politician; romance rhetoric has become linked to the unnatural and unprincipled pursuit of power. The title of the chapter, the “Rights of Woman,” and the fact that Harriot, as a cross-

the political activist, is one of the “unsex’d females,” indicate that Edgeworth is referring to the radical female participants of the French Revolution debate and in particular to Wollstonecraft.<sup>132</sup> However, Harriot Freke’s corrupt electioneering habits also demonstrates that Edgeworth is making a wider point against political impurity and placemanship.

That romance rhetoric is associated with such impurity in *Belinda* indicates the distance between Edgeworth’s use of romance and Reeve’s. For writers after Burke the slippage of terms between the older and newer meanings of romance, along with its associations with chivalry and arbitrary distribution of power made its imagery difficult to employ. When it was used favourably, it was often with a redefinition which emptied it of most of its previous meaning. In *Belinda* Edgeworth’s ideal husband, Mr Percival, like Austen’s George Knightley in *Emma*, is an attempt to suggest that true valour accompanies the rational rather than the chivalric. For Reeve, however, the very distortions of romance had been capable of working for the greater moral and political good. In her preface to *The Old English Baron* Reeve explains this using the image of the veil, later often employed by writers of the gothic to indicate the more suspicious aspect of the form:

Romance displays only the amiable side of the picture; it shews the pleasing features, and throws a veil over the blemishes: Mankind are naturally pleased with what gratifies their vanity; and vanity, like all other passions of the human heart, may be rendered subservient to good and useful purposes. (3)

Reeve used romance criticism to discuss the importance of morality for the health of the nation and exploited the roles it offered women to give them greater authority. However, her contribution was obscured. *Destination* was her last attempt to re-imagine the imagery of romance for a more middle class setting.

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<sup>132</sup> The expression is from the title of Richard Polwhele’s “The Unsex’d Females: Poem, Addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature” (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798).

### iii. *Destination: From romance to real estate*

As a country became civilized, their narrations were methodized, and moderated to probability. - From the prose recitals sprung History, - from the war-songs Romance and Epic poetry. (Reeve, *Progress* 1: 14)

It was said by Fletcher of Saltoun, "Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws." Might it not be said with as much propriety, Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems?<sup>133</sup>

Barbauld's and Reeve's comments illustrate two main points. First, they show agreement that fiction can have a stronger influence on a nation than legislation or government; thus the two authors associate themselves with such quasi-political activity with a boldness not indicated by Watt's 1957 judgement. In his study *The Rise of the Novel* Watt remarks: "The majority of eighteenth-century novels were actually written by women, but this had long remained a purely quantitative assertion of dominance."<sup>134</sup> Secondly, Barbauld's connection of the "novel" rather than romance with cultural power suggests not only the difference in her project and Reeve's but also the increasing status of the novel over those twenty-five years.

However, Barbauld's preface gives the history of the novel with a cosmopolitanism characteristic of romance criticism. The wide reaching account of fiction in her preface signals that the romance and its criticism had a persistent effect on the formation of national identity, as Barbauld and Reeve would argue,

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<sup>133</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *The British Novelists; With an Essay; and Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, 50 vols (London: Rivington; Otridge; Strahan; Payne; Robinson; Lowndes; Wilkie and Robinson; Scatchell and Letterman; Walker; Cuthell; Vernor, Hood and Sharpe; Lea; Nunn, Lackington; Clarke; Law; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Cadell and Davies; Jeffery; Newman; Crosby; Carpenter; Bagster; Booth; Murray; Richardson; Black, Parry and Kingsbury; Harding; Phillips; Mawman; Booker; Asperne; Baldwin; Mathews and Leigh; Faulder; Johnson; Sherwood; Miller, Edinburgh: Creech; York: Wilson, 1810), 1: 62.

<sup>134</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; London: Hogarth, 1987), 298; subsequently Watt.

and on the novel tradition in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Notwithstanding this, critical attempts to determine the relationship of the novel and the romance in this period have often been vexed.<sup>135</sup> In particular, due to the emphasis placed on formal realism by Watt, the influence of romance imagery on the novel has been underrated. Reeve herself separated the romance and the novel along lines of probability, but in both her critical endeavour, *The Progress of Romance*, and in her fiction she treated them together. Reeve had used the trappings of romance to discuss inherited power and to invest it with glamour. However, she was concerned about the effect of education upon the social stability she felt was so important. This section demonstrates that, following her exploration of romance, Reeve used educational writings as a way of legislating her concerns about the erosion of rank. While other writers connected romance imagery with such erosion, Reeve used romance motifs as an educative force for social stability. An examination of her novel, *Destination*, reveals that Reeve saw her position as author as essentially political. It also rewrites Watt's history of the novel to demonstrate the importance of literary inheritance and romance to the middle ranks. This attempt was all the more significant because by 1799 the imagery of romance was tarnished.

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<sup>135</sup>This might be in part because, as the writings included in Ioan Williams's *Novel and Romance 1700 – 1800* indicate, the usage of the terms was not always consistent, particularly when the categorisation of fictional works of the eighteenth century is taken into account; see Paul Gregory Bator, "Rhetoric and the Novel in the Eighteenth-Century British University Curriculum," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30 (1997): 173 – 95. The critical problem is also complicated by problems of genre theory; in his article Bator argues that "the eighteenth-century professors of rhetoric and belles lettres were more primarily concerned with describing the novel or romance as an interrelated or overlapping species of historiography than they were at all in delimiting a new genre" (186). In contrast, certain present day critics, Bator argues, assume that the term "genre" can be unquestioningly applied "to the eighteenth-century form [the novel] they are attempting to define" (187); see also Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1660 – 1740* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 1, 63. This is not a particular concern for this argument for several reasons. First, Reeve herself distinguishes the romance and the novel clearly (though in treating them together, she suggests that they have substantial common ground). She comments in *The Progress of Romance*: "The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. – The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion [ . . . ] that all is real. . . ." (1: 111). Secondly, even where the distinction between the romance and the novel might have been problematic, the imagery of

Eager to disassociate the novel from older literary forms, Watt argued for a freshness of vision amongst the authorial representatives of the middle ranks.

“Defoe and Richardson,” he wrote:

are the first great writers in our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature. In this, they differ from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, for instance, who, like the writers of Greece and Rome, habitually used traditional plots; and who did so, in the last analysis, because they accepted the general premise of their times that, since Nature is essentially complete and unchanging, its records, whether scriptural, legendary or historical, constitute a definitive repertoire of human experience.

(Watt 14)

Watt’s enthusiasm for this shift in direction is paralleled by his worries about Fielding whose remarks in *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* (1742) about his “comic epic in prose” announce his allegiance to literary tradition.<sup>136</sup> In truth, Fielding was not alone in trying to construct some literary continuity, as the efforts of preface writers and explorers of romance attest. Even writers who incorporated the features Watt identified could not break entirely with the past – as the middle ranks had an economic heritage, they also had a literary heritage to come to terms with.

Both literary and financial forms of inheritance were of lasting interest to Reeve. Her use of the traits of romance and the novel suggested not so much a desire to temper probability by fantasy as her belief in both the distinction of rank and legality. From early on this gave rise to certain tensions in Reeve’s fiction, as criticisms of *The Old English Baron* indicate. Walpole, implicitly measuring Reeve’s work against the romance, notes: “It is so probable, that any trial for

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the older romance would have been comparatively easy to distinguish. Reeve, like other commentators, associates it and its imagery with feudalism and chivalry.

<sup>136</sup>Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams and An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* (1742, 1741), ed. Douglas Brooks (London: Oxford UP, 1970), 4.



murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story.<sup>137</sup> Mrs Barbut's [sic] fragment was excellent.<sup>138</sup> This is a caput mortuum" (*Walpole's Correspondence* 28: 381 - 82). Similarly, in *Lives*, Scott protested that the notion of probability and ghosts do not mix: "If we are to try ghosts by the ordinary rules of humanity, we bar them of their privileges entirely" (547). This insistence on legal terminology by both Scott and Walpole indicates more than Reeve's novelistic emphasis on probability. It reflects the importance of legal equality to Reeve's project. By combining an emphasis on the supposedly general nature of the law with the romance form, Reeve was writing a role for the middle ranks into a literary form based on feudalism.

Reeve's political beliefs are indicated by her attitude to education. On the one hand, she had a desire for a divinely endowed ruling class with innate abilities; on the other, she was acutely aware of the potential for education to destabilise the social order. These tensions are present in *The Old English Baron* and Reeve eventually gave them more extended treatment in her educational writings. Her treatment of education in the novel was a source of critical confusion. James Trainer, in his introduction to *The Old English Baron*, for example, correctly identifies the importance Reeve places on clear distinctions of rank:

This is a structure [of rigid class distinctions] which the author warmly approved and indeed it is essential to her story for Edmund radiates to those around him a quality which is taken by them to point to a nobler parentage than a poor peasant couple. (ix)

This leads Trainer to characterise Reeve as emphasising birth at the expense of education. He claims that Reeve dwelt upon:

all her own eighteenth-century social prejudices, the rigid class distinctions in which master and servant have only 'the same natural

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<sup>137</sup> Walpole had the first London edition of *The Old English Baron* rather than the earlier edition, *The Champion of Virtue*, published in Colchester. The former had the preface in which Reeve criticised *The Castle of Otranto*, the latter did not.



form and endowments' since their difference of birth 'had given a conscious superiority to the one, and conscious inferiority to the other'. (*O.E.B.* ix)

Reeve, however, recounting the conversation between Sir Philip and the peasant, Wyatt, had actually written: "They conversed together on common subjects, like fellow-creatures of the same natural form and endowments, though different kinds of education had given a conscious superiority to the one, a conscious inferiority to the other" (*O.E.B.* 11). Reeve's belief in the importance of rank is, then, accompanied by her recognition of education's ability to improve the individual and even to change his place in the social order. However, Reeve at times contradicts herself. The hero of *The Old English Baron*, Edmund, has astonishing natural abilities. Though brought up almost from birth by peasants, he nevertheless has an instinctive desire to read, an innate ability at all upper class pursuits and a confirmed (though, perhaps, hardly unusual) dislike for manual work.

Reeve in fact shows a wistfulness for a natural upper class divinely endowed with leadership qualities, as her selection of the genre of romance, with its feudal associations, indicates. However, she is also well aware that abilities do not correspond with rank and that education enables social movement. In her attempt to reconcile these aspects of her thought, Reeve left aside for a while her fascination with romance and the novel and concentrated upon education. There she attempted to neutralise the potential social change which education could cause by emphasising that education should be according to rank. However, for Reeve such a class-determined education was not linked with tyranny, or moral weakness, as it would have been for Wollstonecraft or Priestley. Instead, as *The School for Widows* indicated, for Reeve it coexisted with an independence of spirit. In *Plans of Education, with Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers*, published one year later in 1792, Reeve's ideas are more stringent. She notes that Fénelon had divided

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<sup>138</sup> Walpole is referring to the essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; With Sir Bertrand, a Fragment," published in J. and A. L. Aikin's *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose*

society into seven classes (and slaves), and explores what she sees as the equivalents in her own country. For each class, a suitable mode of education is described, and one of Reeve's primary motivations in this is to prevent people mimicking the manners of those above them in the social structure.<sup>139</sup> Her remarks suggest that her notion of education according to rank is not based merely on an idea of economic function. It is also based on the idea of innate skills. This aspect of Reeve's thinking explains her concern with heritage. After all, if one is going to educate people according to their rank (and the innate abilities which allegedly come with it) it is particularly important to establish accurately what that rank is. For Reeve the matter of inheritance, both financial and intellectual, was therefore extremely important for the lower orders as well as for the aristocracy. Hence romance, which in Reeve's earlier work had been so bound up with tradition, became a vehicle for the discussion of such matters. In *Destination* Reeve put romance motifs to work in the arena of the middle ranks in order to provide an ethical framework for dealing with wealth and inheritance.

However, while for Reeve the veiling effects of romance disguised the worst features of human nature, allowing it to provide a genteel education, for other women novelists romance was not allied to genealogical or social legitimacy. In *Ringrove* (1827), for example, Jane West associates romance imagery with an ill-fated movement from social origin:

I presume by some powerful enchantment my whole sex is  
now comprised under the enviable distinction of fine ladies; for  
in the literary regale lately spread for our amusement, no

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(117 - 37).

<sup>139</sup>She thinks sumptuary laws should be introduced and that the charitable would be better off forming schools of industry for the children of the poor than worrying about Emancipation (Reeve, *Plans* 74, 79). The slaves, Reeve ignorantly proclaims, do not have a particularly difficult life, and in addition their natural tendencies do not to her appear promising (Reeve, *Plans* 80 - 88). "Englishmen were never reckoned cruel, though there may have been some instances of it, as there have of the most exalted virtues in the negro race; but these do not characterize a whole nation" (Reeve, *Plans* 81).

young woman is allowed any other occupation than to kill

time, spend money, and make conquests.<sup>140</sup>

Even though her Burkean fictions emphasise that value should be placed on tradition, West's parodic reference to "enchantment" indicates that she does not associate romance with correct inheritance. Rather, for her it is linked with the limitation and corruption of women. The "enchantment" of romance imagery operates to give her reading women aspirations above their station, which might ultimately prove a threat to the social order.

Correspondingly, suspicious either of socially inherited authority or of usurpation and so dubious about the concept of inheritance, authors of popular fiction often placed the imagery of gothic and romance at the disposal of "the masculine passion of unregulated, individualistic desire."<sup>141</sup> In particular, use of the supernatural underwent a change in direction. Whereas for both Reeve and Walpole the supernatural had worked for the favoured ideology, in favour, that is, of rightful inheritance, in Radcliffe's work, for example, the supernatural appears threatening, both to the middle ranks and to the social order.<sup>142</sup> In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for example, the supernatural and the imagery of feudalism connected with romance are employed for Radcliffe's exploration of the issues of inheritance and rapacious greed. The heroine, Emily, is haunted by the fear that Montoni has murdered Laurentina in order to gain control of the castle. These suspicions give a

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<sup>140</sup> Jane West, *Ringrove; Or, Old Fashioned Notions*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827), 2: 57.

<sup>141</sup> Mary Poovey, "Ideology and the Mysteries of Udolpho," *Criticism* 21 (1979): 307 - 30, quoted from 308.

<sup>142</sup> See also Stefan Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel," *ELH* 66 (1999): 739 - 58, quoted from 744. Andriopolis notes that from Walpole to Radcliffe, "the supernatural interventions manipulating disorder into order are gradually concealed," but he fails to distinguish between the supernatural and the religious (a distinction which would have been important to Radcliffe). In fact, while visions and the supernatural work in allegiance with the godly in *The Old English Baron*, in Radcliffe's work the "invisible hand" is God's, though other supernatural occurrences are frequently illusory threats. There are only a few occasions when the (apparently) supernatural works in favour of the hero or heroine; see, for example, Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: World's Classics-Oxford UP, 1980). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Montoni tells his sinister guests the tale of Lady Laurentini's disappearance but is interrupted by echoes. These echoes, later found to have been made by Ludovico, make Montoni "discomposed" (291). Though an instance of

much darker appearance to Montoni's other attempts to raise money – in particular, to his attempted extortion of Emily's aunt and to his treatment of Emily. However, Montoni has not murdered Laurentina in order to inherit the castle and, after this has been understood, his other attempts to raise money appear less threatening. Radcliffe's novels often connect romance imagery with an extreme fear of disinheritance. However, Reeve's belief in education according to rank and her insistence that heritage was a rightful concern of the middle ranks meant that she could attempt to reclaim the imagery of romance.

By 1799, then, when *Destination* was published, the British public were familiar with a darker variety of romance image which they connected with deception or overstrained sensibility. In *Destination*, in contrast, Reeve shows how the motifs of the gothic can be used to maintain a middle class "probability" (*O.E.B.* 4). The first attempt at moderation comes in the tale's location, not in Italy, but, as with the *Old English Baron*, in England and, furthermore, in England of the eighteenth century. In this setting Reeve strengthens the link between gothic and economic language which Andriopoulos notes in his article, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel" (739 – 40). She uses updated gothic motifs to examine good and bad trading practices as well as with the issue of inheritance for the middle ranks. Hence the dead point out the line of their property's descent not by supernatural means as they had in *The Old English Baron*, or even by crumbling manuscripts, but by wills;<sup>143</sup> the castle, "seat of ... ancestors" is replaced by a newly purchased mansion, used as a schoolhouse (Reeve, *O.E.B.* 10). The exotic is provided, not by changing the period, or placing a protagonist in "the service of the Greek Emperor [. . .] against the encroachments of the Saracens," but by Arthur Stanford's trade in India (Reeve, *O.E.B.* 7). In short, Reeve alters many of the usual gothic and romance motifs to fit a new, middle-class framework in which trade and increasing one's capital becomes the quest. Typically

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superstition working against the villain, it also serves Radcliffe's more usual purpose of heightening the threat of illegal inheritance.

of Reeve, however, it is a quest only to be undertaken with due consideration of one's heritage. Reeve uses the romance motif of transformation to distinguish between quixotic and economically viable attitudes to trade and inheritance.

Despite Reeve's title, "*Destination*," progress in the novel is in fact dependent on a correct relationship to the past. Reeve's translated gothic motifs of will, house and lineage indicate this. She descends back into the past of her "private family" as far as three generations, not far in terms of an aristocratic bloodline, but a significant period of time for a lower ranking family. The period of three generations seems even more significant remembering Watt's claims about the emergence of a new class and its relation to Defoe's writing. *Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719.<sup>144</sup> Reeve's middle class family history does not stretch back much further. This hints that she marked the beginning of the eighteenth-century as a particularly significant time for the middle ranks. Her suggestion, however, is not that they felt constricted by their heritage. Rather, she saw it as a time when, as their position became consolidated, the issue of inheritance gained importance. Reeve explores such issues by examining two varieties of romance imagery, the positive and the negative.

The darker imagery of romance is present in *Destination* but it is associated with poor trading practice and a bad attitude to inheritance. In *Destination* Robert represents the threat to the established order. Robert is nephew to Mr William Bartlett and cousin to his son, the financially astute hero, William. Brought up by old Mr Bartlett like a son, Robert becomes dissatisfied with his distant relationship to the wealth of his benefactor and pretends that he is Mr Bartlett's eldest child in order to gain a living. William discovers Robert's attempt at metamorphosis when Mr Ashford (William's mentor) tells him that Ashford's steward had made "an

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<sup>143</sup> See in particular 2: 54 – 59, where the will of the hero's father, William Bartlett, is given in full.

<sup>144</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe: An Authoritative Text: Contexts, Criticism* (1719), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Michael Shinagel, Norton Critical Edition (London: Norton, 1994); Reeve refers to *Robinson Crusoe* as giving an "account of unknown or rather of *Ideal* countries," but notes it is written from "religion and virtue" (*Progress* 1: 125). Hortensius asks whether *Robinson Crusoe* is a romance or a novel and Euphrasia replies that it "partake[s] of the nature of both, but I consider [it] as of a different species from either, as [. . .] singular and Original" (*Progress* 1: 127).

apology to [Mr Ashford] that the living was already promised before Mr Bartlett's son applied for it" (Reeve, *Destination* 3: 79). Robert's application relies on a kind of false capital, the capital of an assumed name. The steward's response, unsolicited by William or Mr Ashford, suggests the same dislocating breakdown of exchange. As a result of Robert's machinations, William has some trouble establishing his identity - Mr Ashford observes that he "found some trouble to convince the steward of the truth; but at last he believed me" (Reeve, *Destination* 2: 80). In fact, Robert's attempts at usurpation are as numerous and repetitive as Mr B's attempts on the virtue of Richardson's heroine, Pamela.<sup>145</sup> He encroaches time and time again, attempting to set up another school on the strength of being the elder son of Mr Bartlett, and later carrying off valuable school fixtures (3: 48). In each incident Reeve exposes Robert's forgery relatively quickly, but she is compelled to revisit the site of this anxiety time and time again. Such false transformations, whether of people or property, are connected explicitly with romance. When Robert tries to create gold from alchemy, William comments: "Having obtained this intelligence, I perfectly understood the windmill schemes that Robert was in pursuit of" (Reeve, *Destination* 3: 178). In a metaphor she was fond of, Reeve suggested that, as Don Quixote could not distinguish between windmills and giants, Robert could not distinguish between true and false ways of making money.<sup>146</sup>

Reeve's oblique reference to Don Quixote has another significance, however. When discussing Cervantes in *The Progress of Romance* Reeve emphasised that after writing *Don Quixote*, he had written more romances, and added that romance can establish a higher code of conduct (Reeve, *Progress* 2: 81). In indirectly comparing romance with trade, therefore, Reeve suggests that while both may be misapplied or lead to socially unproductive behaviour, this is not a fault with the systems per se but arises when they are poorly interpreted. Reeve's remarks on

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<sup>145</sup>Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), ed. Peter Sabor, introd. Margaret A. Doody (London: Penguin, 1980).

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, Euphrasia's words to Hortensius in *The Progress of Romance*: "You will then become a Knight errant, to combat with the windmills, which your imagination represents as Giants; while in the meantime you leave a side unguarded" (1: 82).

Cervantes imply that there are good romance traditions which parallel the bad; these, according to Reeve, can be rescued and brought to the service of the new trading classes, as her use of the imagery of metamorphosis in *Destination* reflects.

Corresponding to Robert's sinister transformations and disregard of tradition is the more responsible and supposedly more moral metamorphosis of Arthur Stanford, whose name, like Edmund's in *The Old English Baron*, has positive associations in national mythology. In *Destination*, Arthur leaves the East India Company because he finds the way in which the trade is carried out exploitative of the Indians. Moving to live and trade among them, Arthur is able to observe them more closely and with less prejudice than his countrymen. He works for a local merchant, and makes an inter-racial marriage (though with a woman who has English blood). His father treats this news as a fantasy: " 'It is a strange story altogether, and like your books of adventures'" (2: 98). It seems like "dreams and fables" (2: 99). When he returns home his friend, William, does not immediately recognise him because he sees two men in Indian dress: "One of them saluted me in the Indian manner. I desired him to introduce me to Mr Stanmore. He came round and embraced me. 'Can any dress conceal Arthur Stanmore from his friend and brother William Bartlett?' " (Reeve, *Destination* 3: 112). Arthur, far from being a domineering colonial, carrying out an unfair trade, has been able to become at least partly culturally assimilated, living on terms of respect and affection with the Indians. Importantly from Reeve's point of view, he has also generated much larger profits than he would have if he had continued with the East India Trading Company.

Arthur's transformation suggests the use of Indian culture to promote British interests. Reeve's exploration of British trade in India is, however, unsurprising given that during the late eighteenth-century the relation between England and the peripheries of Britain and the overseas colonies was a focus of literary attention. The relation of culture at the centre and the peripheries at this time became a target for nationalist and imperialist energies. In her study *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (1997) Katie Trumpener



remarks that the nationalists “argue for the specificity and separate historical development of particular regions” while “enlightened imperialists arguing along opposite line, see this distinct character as a symptom of backwardness.”<sup>147</sup> Reeve’s perspective is interesting because it appears to be a strange combination of the two, facilitated by aesthetics, yet, according to her, justified along pragmatic lines.

Arthur’s acknowledgement of local difference places him closer to the first of the positions outlined by Trumpener, but his motivations are not at all nationalist. Instead, he uses cultural respect and integration to make money. Through him Reeve suggests that for imperial type powers cultural integration is the most efficient method. Moreover, this integration need not effect the cultural integrity of the centre in any particularly profound way. The transformation may be as superficial as the garments Arthur lifts to show that he is still in essence the same: “As to the drapery it has its uses [treasure is sown into it]; but under it beats the heart of your friend Arthur, who loves you most of any man living” (3: 113). Indeed, in respect of its superficiality, Arthur’s use of cultural symbols bears some relationship to a phenomenon noted by Trumpener. Trumpener suggests that the increasing popularity of bardic poetry in English culture presented a danger to local identity because it threatened to empty it of all specific cultural meaning (6). Arthur’s use of Indian customs is as ideologically suspect as Mary Crawford’s harp-playing in *Mansfield Park*, but Reeve, unlike Austen, presents it as a positive opportunity to generate income.

Given that Arthur’s transformation is presented as the constructive counterpart to Robert’s, it is significant that Arthur has a much better attitude to inheritance than Robert. He shares Crusoe’s *Wanderlust* and desires to work in India as a trader but his father at first violently opposes Arthur’s choice. Arthur is advised by an older friend and relation not to rebel but to discuss the matter with him. Mr Stanford gets Arthur to describe his ambition and then comments: “That

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<sup>147</sup> Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997) xi.

boy is inspired! - his genius opens upon me . That spirit shall no longer be checked.  
- I will assist its efforts to prove itself in the way that Nature so strongly points out” (Reeve, *Destination* 1: 127). The word “genius” here is undoubtedly used to refer to a particular talent in an individual. It is not the transcendental romantic notion of genius that is being invoked, but there is a sense of Arthur’s own individuality, even originality. The word also, significantly, suggests it is possible for trade to have its vocabulary of aesthetics. A good trader negotiates with tradition.

In short, Arthur’s recommended behaviour can be traced to similar models of taste to those propounded in *The Progress of Romance*. Reeve’s notion of the successful businessman of *Destination* relates to Reeve’s favoured model of critical behaviour. Similarly, Arthur’s respect for tradition and his willingness to reshape it correspond with the suggestion that Reeve makes in the margin of her critical space when recounting the story of Charoba – a certain amount of creativity in approaching tradition is desirable. The respect Arthur shows for cultural traditions makes him rather like the later Hortensius, finally able to see that the Turks may be considered as judging aesthetic subjects. As a result, Arthur is able to make cultural observations at first hand and this leads to successful trade, as Euphrasia argues in *The Progress of Romance* that it leads to successful criticism.

In *Destination* Reeve attempts to reclaim the battered motifs of romance which the events between the publication of *The Old English Baron* and the end of the century had left damaged. She invokes the literary inheritance of romance in an attempt to show that romance motifs, often associated with a corrupt aristocracy, with fears of illegitimacy or with rapacious greed, can be claimed to give authority to middle class trade and colonialism. Reeve hence demonstrates the ongoing importance of romance to the novel and specifically to the novel as concerned with the middle ranks. However, her work also indicates that this was a delicate process of negotiation.

## Chapter II

### Harriet and Sophia Lee

#### i. Introduction

One possible reason that the evasion of literary history has become so nearly universal may have to do with our current skepticism about the possibility of writing literary history worthy of the name. This skepticism has a long and honourable tradition.<sup>148</sup>

When the gothic and romance are discussed, doubts about the possibility of literary history frequently emerge because, as David H. Richter comments: "Gothic itself seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it" (Richter 59). This reinterpretation and questioning of history makes the literary past itself more vulnerable. Indeed, the scepticism which Richter traces back to the 1950s has its inception with what is often cited as the beginning of gothic itself; Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* questions the adequacy of eighteenth-century politicised histories and its unease about such narratives is continued by Clara Reeve. While her *Old English Baron* attempts to legitimise the histories Walpole had mocked, *The Progress of Romance* admits history's malleability. Both Walpole and Reeve were concerned that the narratives of history should allow the correct transfer of property. However, the gothic was used, particularly in the 1790s, to express more wholesale worries about social institutions and discourses. Both *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman. A Fragment* (1798)

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<sup>148</sup> David H. Richter, *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1996), 11; subsequently Richter.

generate a sense of inescapable social forces upon the individual.<sup>149</sup> Both present a committed critique of the construction of society which amounts to a call for its reconceptualisation.

In her essay “Learning What we Have Forgotten: Repetition as Remembrance in Early Nineteenth-Century Gothic,” Ruth Parkin-Gounelas argues that, “by the time of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* of 1818 [. . .] Gothic had become a vehicle not for dismembering the old order but rather for “re-membering” a new body (politic).”<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, thirty-five years previous to *Frankenstein* and more than a decade before *Caleb Williams* this process was under way in Sophia Lee’s *The Recess*.<sup>151</sup> In *The Recess* the forces of history and public responsibility exert such pressure on Sophia Lee’s sentimental heroines that a new kind of “re-membering” which does not suppress the emotional and personal is called for. To a far greater extent than either Walpole and Reeve, Sophia Lee and her sister, Harriet, demonstrate the radical suspicion of (literary) history that Richter connects with the gothic. Distrustful of both the authority of history and aesthetic disinterestedness, the Lees expose the way such narratives silently remove certain subjects from cultural and national discourse. In so doing, the Lees contributed to what was “perhaps the last real discussion of the fundamentals of politics in this country,” though their contribution has gone largely unnoticed in literary history (Cobban 31).

The suggestion that the Lees were right to have some suspicion about the construction of literary history is reinforced by comments on their work in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (1922).<sup>152</sup> There, George Saintsbury, commenting on Jane Porter, says that her work showed: “A more complete absence

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<sup>149</sup> William Godwin, *Things as They are, or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 1794, ed. Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman. A Fragment* was published by Godwin in the *Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* along with his own *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (see Wollstonecraft, *Works* 1).

<sup>150</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, “Learning What We Have Forgotten: Repetition as Remembrance in Early Nineteenth-Century Gothic,” *European Romantic Review* 6 (1996): 213 - 26, quoted from 216.

<sup>151</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: World’s Classics-Oxford UP, 1994); subsequently *Frankenstein*.

of local colour and historical sense than in Mrs Radcliffe or the three sisters Lee” (306). There were in fact four Lee sisters and one brother; only two of the sisters, Harriet and Sophia, wrote extensively, though Henrietta seems to have worked on a translation with Sophia.<sup>153</sup> Saintsbury’s phrase casts the Lees as characters in a romance, recalling both the “weird sisters” of *Macbeth* and the three fates of classical myth. It sites the Lees within a literary tradition; at the same time it suggests that they are quasi-mythological characters at the edges of the canon whose merit remains questionable and whose influence is obscure. A hundred years earlier Scott’s criticism of Reeve’s lack of masculinity and “statesmanship” indicated his knowledge of her attempt to feminise literary and political value (*Lives* 549 – 50). Similarly, though Saintsbury’s location of the Lees outside rational discourse acts as a dismissal of their efforts, it is also an admission of the way in which their writing questioned historical and national narratives.<sup>154</sup>

While later critical work adopted a more sophisticated stance toward the question of inheritance and history, it did not extensively assess the Lees’ position with regard either to the gothic novel or to the political debates which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. April Allison’s article “The Value of a Literary

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<sup>152</sup> A. W. Ward, and A. R. Waller, eds. *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 11. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922).

<sup>153</sup> “Biographical Sketch of Miss Lee,” *The Monthly Mirror* 4 (1797): 4 – 7, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib+105>; quoted from 4; the article begins by noting that “Sophia Lee is one of the four daughters of Mr. John Lee” (4). On the other hand, Elizabeth R. Napier writes that on the death of her mother Sophia was obliged to “take care of four sisters” – see Elizabeth R. Napier, “Harriet Lee (1757 – 1 August 1851), Sophia Lee (1750 – 13 March 1824),” *British Novelists, 1660 – 1800*, part 1, ed. Martin C. Battestin, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 39 (Detroit, MI: Brucoli Clark Layman, 1985) 301 – 306, see especially 302 ; she also notes that Harriet and Sophia ran their school in Bath with their sister Ann (302). For Henrietta Lee see Peter Bayssière, *Peter Bayssière, A Roman Catholic Story. Translated from the French by Henrietta and Sophia Lee*, pref. J. R. Cooper (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1835).

<sup>154</sup> Compensating for Saintsbury’s misinformation, MacCarthy in *The Female Pen* and Spender, as well as Summers in *The Gothic Quest*, all spend more time on biography and plot summary than analysis; see MacCarthy, *The Female Pen* 42 - 53; Spender, *Mothers of the Novel* 232 – 45; Tompkins’ introduction to the 1972 edition of *The Recess*, especially vii – ix; and Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938; New York: Russell, 1964), 64 – 67; subsequently referred to as Summers. For a more detailed account see Devendra P. Varma, introduction to Sophia Lee’s *The Recess; Or a Tale of Other Times* (vii – xlviii); and James R. Foster, “The Abbe Prevost and the English Novel,” *PMLA* 42 (1927): 443 - 64. As Foster had done, Varma’s introduction traces *The Recess*’s

Legacy: Retracing the Transmission of Value through Female Lines,” for example, indicates how *The Recess* plays with the plot conventions of the form to explore the possibility of matrilineal inheritance.<sup>155</sup> However, Allison’s account neglects the way in which the Lees’ emphasis on sentiment is coupled with a suspicion of impartiality and disinterestedness. On the other hand, *The Recess*’s relation to both “the discontinuous idiom of sensibility and the linear, coherent narratives of enlightenment historiography” is recognised in Jayne Elizabeth Lewis’s article “‘Ev’ry Lost Relation’: Historical Fictions and Sentimental Incidents in Sophia Lee’s *The Recess*.”<sup>156</sup> Lewis wants to see *The Recess* as offering through sentiment a complementary mode of viewing history, rather than a challenge to Enlightenment historiography.<sup>157</sup> She does not consider how the Lees’ distrust of the notion of disinterested authority leads them to challenge not only historiography but also prestigious texts, literary tradition and the status of nation.

In their questioning of cultural and historical authority, the Lees showed a willingness to adapt canonical works which may have been a result of their background. Their father, the actor, John Lee, “altered some of the plays of Shakspeare [sic], which [were] severely censured by the dramatic critics.”<sup>158</sup> His influence upon his daughter was a source of speculation for Tompkins in the Arno reprint, where she wonders if his familiarity with the theatre aided Sophia in writing

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genealogical origins, its relation to the gothic, sentimental and historical, and its debt to Prevost and d’Arnaud, but examines little of Sophia Lee’s writing.

<sup>155</sup>April Alliston, “The Value of a Literary Legacy: Retracing the Transmission of Value through Female Lines,” *Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities* 4 (1990): 109 – 27.

<sup>156</sup>Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, “‘Ev’ry Lost Relation’: Historical Fictions and Sentimental Incidents in Sophia Lee’s *The Recess*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7 (1995): 165 – 84, quoted from 166; subsequently Lewis.

<sup>157</sup>Discussing Ronald Paulson’s thesis that the Gothic novel is about the tensions of the French Revolution and Kate Ellis’s treatment of the gothic as a discussion of “separate spheres,” Richter writes, “in Paulson and Ellis - as in so much of the new historicism - we see the scratching of the allegorical itch” (54 - 55). He goes on to suggest that this is partly because of the historical association of romance with the allegorical. However, the Lees’ interest in history, nation and the distribution of power can be seen in their choice of subject matter.

<sup>158</sup>“Biography: Miss Sophia Lee,” *Literary Chronicle / JAS* 253 (March 1824): 190, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=242>, 190; subsequently “Biography: Miss Sophia Lee.” Lee was more successful as an actor, playing major roles,

*The Chapter of Accidents*, produced at Haymarket on August 5<sup>th</sup> 1780.<sup>159</sup> However, Tompkins, having made the supposition, undermines it by citing John Genest's opinion that Sophia Lee had written it herself.<sup>160</sup>

In writing her first play, Lee both depicted and experienced a conflict between the individual and social mores that, expressed in more sentimental form, was to become a hallmark of the more radical novels of the 1790s. *The Chapter of Accidents* was itself at first more sentimental but went through numerous transformations. After it was first written, Sophia Lee read a translation of Diderot's *Père de Famille* and laid her own play aside. Rewriting it later, as she records in the preface, she changed its tone to correspond with literary fashion: "Sentiment was now exploded, and I therefore sought to diversify it with humour" (*Chapter iv*). Having created a three act opera, she attempted to modify it but eventually "cut out the songs and lengthened it into five acts" (*Chapter vi*). It was performed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1780 at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket with a prologue in which Colman, perhaps significantly, comments:

Long has the passive stage, howe'er absurd,  
Been rul'd by names, and govern'd by a word.  
Some poor cant term, like magic spells, can awe,  
And bind our realms, like a dramatic law. (*Chapter xiii*)

In response not to settled indicators of literary value but to fashion, the play shifted literary identity, its metamorphosis the generic equivalent of the farce's transformations of its heroine.

Sophia Lee's next work, *The Recess; Or, a Tale of Other Times* (1783 - 85), was to explore further the theme of the public pressures placed on sentiment.

Written while the Lee sisters were running a school at Bath, *The Recess* explores the

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including Jaques in *As You Like It*, Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Macbeth and the Duke in *Measure for Measure* (Summers 164).

<sup>159</sup>Sophia Lee, *The Chapter of Accidents. A Comedy*, 1780, *British Theatre*, vol. 20 (London, Cawthorn: 1796); subsequently *Chapter*.

<sup>160</sup>Sophia Lee, *The Recess* x; see also J. Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, 10 vols (Bath: Carrington; London: Rodd, 1832); Genest

stress placed on the individual, not only by other members of society or by fate as in *The Chapter of Accidents*, but by the authoritative discourses of literature and history.<sup>161</sup> Drawing, though not explicitly, on the tradition that Mary Queen of Scots had illegitimate twins, the novel sketches the life of two fictional sisters, Matilda and Ellinor, the daughters of Mary Queen of Scots and the Duke of Norfolk, who is imagined to have secretly married Mary.<sup>162</sup> At first hidden in the recess, the sisters are later exposed to court life and, as a result, experience alternating periods of freedom and confinement. These episodes provide the rhythm which holds the disparate narratives of the volumes together. The story of *The Recess* is largely told by Matilda, though there are other histories, including the tale of Lady Scroope, narrated by Mrs Marlow (Lee, *Recess* 1: 25 - 78); Lord Leicester's tale (Lee, *Recess* 1: 102 - 45); and that of Mary, Matilda's daughter (Lee, *Recess* 3: 327 - 39). A section is also written by Ellinor whose interpretation of Lord Leicester's character differs markedly from that of Matilda, his wife (Lee, *Recess* 2: 158 - 3: 152). Through its use of the differing voices of the epistolary form, often associated with radical sentimental fiction, the novel disrupts any notion of detached historical narrative and underlines the interrelation of the public and personal.

The way in which *The Recess* destabilises the boundaries between public and private makes it far closer to the gothic novels of the 1790s than to the novels often considered its predecessors. *The Recess* is in fact a substantial departure from the Abbé Prevost's *Cleveland*, translated into English in 1732, or Baculard d'Arnaud's *Warbeck* (1774).<sup>163</sup> Both of these are historical romances in which the central figures

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unequivocally attributes the play to Sophia Lee, "this C[omedy]. was written by Miss Lee, daughter to the actor" (6: 158).

<sup>161</sup>It was only five months after the production of *The Chapter of Accidents*, that "MISS LEE, and Sisters," prepared to set up a school, "respectfully address[ing] their terms to Parents" in *The Bath Chronicle*. The school was due to open on 16<sup>th</sup> of January and the sisters remained there till 1803. See "No. 9, Vineyard, Opposite Paragon Building, Bath," *Bath Chronicle* 21 Dec 1780: 1. This is said to have been in "Belvedere House" by the D.L.B. (Napier 302).

<sup>162</sup>Ellinor's name is not spelt consistently throughout Lee's *The Recess*; it sometimes appears as "Eleanor," as, for example, at 1:7.

<sup>163</sup>[Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles], *The Life and Entertaining Adventures of Mr. Cleveland, Natural Son of Oliver Cromwell, Written by Himself. Giving a Particular Account of His Unhappiness in Love, Marriage, Friendship, & c. and His Great Sufferings in Europe*



have to go into hiding, using recess-like caves for shelter and both fictionalise historical figures. *Cleveland* depicts Oliver Cromwell as privately so sexually licentious that his public stance is completely hypocritical while in *Warbeck* the hero's love is manipulated by his advisors in order to drive his ambition. Unlike *Cleveland* and *Warbeck*, however, *The Recess* offers the possibility of a complete divide between the personal and historical and then destroys it. After the sisters' first departure from *The Recess*, the divide is constantly threatened, undermined and denied. No private realm remains secluded and no public action is without private motivation. Prefiguring *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein*, Lee translates the inescapability of the public and historical into a striking rhythm of flight and confinement which the work of D'Arnaud and Prevost lacks.

The opening of Lee's novel in fact parallels *Frankenstein*, a novel in which the central character is denied a place in the historical order. Both Matilda and the creature are outside the narratives of history, their existences secret. The initial education of both has the same empiricist tendency that occurs in the Edgeworths' *Practical Education* (1798) and in *Early Lessons* (1801).<sup>164</sup> In *Frankenstein* the creature tells Victor, "it is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused," but he quickly begins to classify his impressions (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 79). In the same way that the monster cannot initially tell a more historical story of his parentage, Matilda

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and America. *Intermixed with Reflections, Describing the Heart of Man in All Its Variety of Passions and Disguises; Also Some Curious Particulars of Oliver's History – Amours, Never Before Made Publick*, 5 vols (London: Astley, 1734). Sophia Lee, trans. *Warbeck: A Pathetic Tale. Translated by the Author of The Recess*, [by François Thomas Baculard d'Arnaud], 2 vols (Dublin: Colbert, 1786).

<sup>164</sup> In the Edgeworth's educational writings, however, the children are encouraged to reason for themselves, whereas both the creature and Matilda seem to do so spontaneously. Further, the Edgeworths emphasise reason rather than emotion as a moral guide and can therefore be seen to inherit more from Locke than from Shaftesbury or Hutcheson. See Maria and R. L. Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (1798), 2nd ed. (1801), 3 vols, *History of British Educational Thought* (London: Routledge, 1992). In many ways, *Practical Education* relies more directly on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* than on his educational writings; see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1975); subsequently *E.C.H.U.*; see John Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968).

begins with a personal rather than a hereditary narrative of origin. She and her sister, like the creature, begin to reason about the objects around them:

our light proceeded from casements of painted glass, so infinitely above our reach we could never seek a world beyond, and so dim, that the beams of the sun were almost a new object to us when we quitted this retirement. These remarks occurred as our minds unfolded; for at first we were content, through habit and ignorance, nor once bestowed a thought on surrounding objects. (Lee, *Recess* 1: 3)

The education of both corresponds with Locke's suggestion in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that perception is "the first simple idea of reflection" (73; 2: IX. I). Additionally, both the sisters and the creature experience the additional phases outlined by Locke - "retention" and the ability to "distinguish" and "compare" (*E.C.H.U.* 79; 2: X. I). The education of both the sisters and the creature contains the same impulse towards originality outlined by Locke in "The Epistle to the Reader" before his *Essay*:

For the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers, having less regret for what has escaped it, because it is unknown. Thus he who has raised himself above the almsbasket, and not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction. (*E.C.H.U.* 3)

Both Matilda and the creature, like Wollstonecraft's Mary, or Godwin's Caleb Williams, follow Locke in showing considerable "independence of thought." However, in each case social forces seek to repress or deny the individual's narrative.

In *The Recess* the confining force upon the individual is the narrative of history and the attempt to suppress or divide the individual and the historical are productive of sublime terror. According to Weiskel, the "romantic sublime" is

caused by a feeling of expansion in the mind linked to the appreciation of the eternal and infinite.<sup>165</sup> *The Recess* presents a darkened version of this, as the individual, trying to expand, finds herself under extreme pressure from a historical discourse which seeks to deny her existence. This can be more clearly seen by comparing *The Recess* with Coleridge's reaction on entering a gothic cathedral:

But Gothic art is Sublime. On Entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible expression left is, 'that I am nothing.'<sup>166</sup>

The sisters' periods of flight form a parallel to Coleridge's expansion, and their periods of confinement (and in Ellinor's case, madness) represent a kind of burial of self that corresponds to his "I am nothing." The parallel is of course only approximate - the sisters' adventures are more literal than metaphysical, and their harried explorations of the world outside *The Recess* are rather different from Coleridge's more confident expansion. Still, the movement towards the external, then the challenge to the distinctness of the subject remain.

To describe Lee's interest in the pressures exerted upon the individual by the forces of history is not to say that she, as a writer of the gothic, was completely uninterested in issues concerning the rightful descent of inheritance. In *The Recess* the more forceful of Lee's heroines, Matilda, believes that she should reclaim her political legacy. However, this issue pales beside the examination of the psychological effects of history. Sophia Lee's decision to translate Baculard d'Arnaud's *Warbeck* into her own *Warbeck, a Pathetic Tale* (1786) reflects the same interest. Though its hero, a commoner, pretends to be heir to the Stuarts, the novel is concerned not so much with the threat to legitimacy but with the psychological

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<sup>165</sup> Weiskel's discussion of the background to the romantic sublime is of course detailed and complex; see his first chapter "Approaching the Romantic Sublime" 3 – 33, and in particular 1 and 33.

<sup>166</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), 12.

burden of Warbeck's position. Lee followed this with a ballad of a hundred and fifty six stanzas called *A Hermit's Tale: Recorded by His Own Hand and Found in His Cell*, which also examined the pressures placed on domestic life by public duties.<sup>167</sup> In it a shepherd boy turns warrior in order to combat the depredations of the Scots. Engaged in these activities, he rescues and falls in love with a beautiful woman, only to find that she is to marry a Baron of much higher birth. He fights and wounds the Baron and later discovers that the man is his father. However, unlike in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, where the murderous intentions of Schedoni are diverted just in time by the (false) discovery of fatherhood, in *A Hermit's Tale* disclosure comes after the son has mortally wounded his father. While Radcliffe's concern with family inheritance allows some avoidance of generational catastrophe, Lee's ballad instead concentrates upon the injury generated by a rash over-valuing of the martial at the expense of the domestic. Both her father and son have sacrificed personal responsibilities to the instinct for battle.

The preoccupation with the conflict between the supposedly private and the public in *A Hermit's Tale* also continues in Sophia Lee's 1796 tragedy, *Almeyda; Queen of Granada*, in which a struggle between Moors and Christians provides the political background to the misfortunes of Almeyda.<sup>168</sup> The play shows how Abdallah, Almeyda's adviser, attempts to manipulate her into marrying his son, Orasmyn, though she is in love with Alonzo. Almeyda, like the heroines of *The Recess* and of Lee's later novel, *The Life of a Lover*, is, however, "too frank, incautious and ungovern'd" (I. ii). Thus, though the attempts made to restrain her emotions, largely by male characters, ultimately fail, they have tragic consequences (I. ii). As in *The Recess*, the public realm demands the repression of (women's) emotion.

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<sup>167</sup>Sophia Lee, *A Hermit's Tale: Recorded by His Own Hand, and Found in His Cell*, by the Author of *The Recess* (London: Cadell, 1787).

<sup>168</sup>Sophia Lee, *Almeyda, Queen of Granada. A Tragedy. In Five Acts* (London: Woodfall for Cadell and Davies, 1796); for an electronic edition of the text see *British Women Playwrights around 1800* <15 July 1999> 5 March 2000, <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/mirrors/romnet/wp1800/queen.html>.

In contrast to her sister, Harriet Lee was, throughout much of her career, more preoccupied with rank than with the issues of cultural or historical identity that came to interest her in *The Canterbury Tales*. In 1786 she wrote the novel *The Errors of Innocence*, a sentimental story of lovers, in which the issue of inheritance is conventionally couched in terms of lovers facing a class and economic divide.<sup>169</sup> Her play, *The New Peerage*, staged the following year, also explores the tensions produced by differences in rank rather than national tensions.<sup>170</sup> A farce, it explores the possibility of greater closeness between the aristocracy and the mercantile sectors of society. The novel *Clara Lennox* (1797) is also ascribed to Harriet Lee by the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* but in both the English version and subsequent French translation of this book the title page is inscribed “M. Lee”; in addition, in the English edition the author’s dedication is signed “Margaret Lee.”<sup>171</sup> While the attribution of *Clara Lennox* appears extremely doubtful, the year after the novel’s issue Harriet did write a play entitled *The Mysterious Marriage*, in which the almost ubiquitous theme of birth versus personal worth and talent occurs once more.<sup>172</sup> The play was never staged but Lee intended to resolve the tension as in both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*, making the lower-ranking, talented outsider emerge as the legitimate heir.

It was not until the sisters joined forces on a collaborative project, *The Canterbury Tales* (1797 – 1805) that Harriet Lee’s interest in rank was combined with her sister’s fascination in the clash between the narratives of authority and the personal. The introduction to *The Tales* (written by Sophia Lee) begins by describing a group of travellers forced by snow to remain at an inn; each, in the

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<sup>169</sup>Harriet Lee, *The Errors of Innocence*, 5 vols (London: Robinson, 1786).

<sup>170</sup>Harriet Lee, *The New Peerage; Or, Our Eyes May Deceive Us. A Comedy. As it is Performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane* (London: Robinson, 1787).

<sup>171</sup>See M[argaret] Lee, *Clara Lennox; Or, The Distressed Widow. A Novel. Founded on Facts Interspersed with a Historical Description of the Isle of Man*, 2 vols (London: for the authoress by Adlard and sold by Parsons, 1797); see Napier 305.

<sup>172</sup>Harriet Lee, *The Mysterious Marriage, or the Heirship of Roselva. A Play in Three Acts [inProse and Verse]* (London: Robinson, 1798).

manner of Chaucer's own work, agrees to tell a story.<sup>173</sup> The efficacy of the device was questioned by the *Critical Review*:

There is so much spirit in this Introduction, that we cannot wish it had been omitted; and yet we think miss [sic] Lee would have acted more prudently in publishing the tales unconnectedly, than in adopting the title and imitating the plan of Chaucer's admirable work. Her stories want the characteristic excellence of those of Chaucer. We meet with the Traveller's Tale, the Poet's Tale, the Frenchman's Tale, and the Old Woman's Tale; but each of these might, with equal propriety, have been related by any other individual of the company [. . .] the sentiments are alike in all.<sup>174</sup>

As the reviewer notes, the Lees' concern was not directed towards creating distinctive narrators. However, the examination of the literary stereotype was of considerable interest to them. As will be seen, the Lees exploited *The Tales*' literary heritage to explore the difference between high and low status narratives.

Some of the clearest evidence of the relation of Sophia Lee's work to the political debates of the end of the eighteenth century is provided by her novel *The Life of a Lover*.<sup>175</sup> Although published in 1804, it was written much earlier, according to Lee's cautious remarks in the preface that the novel "was planned and written at the early age when imagination takes the lead of reason, and the heart occasionally over-rules both" (*Life* iv). In addition, the novel's heroine shares her name with the heroine of *The Chapter of Accidents*, written much earlier in Lee's career. The novel depicts the tension between sentiment and social pressure in a way

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<sup>173</sup>See Harriet and Sophia Lee, *The Canterbury Tales* (1797 – 1805), 2 vols, Standard Novels 12 - 13 (London: Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Dublin; Cumming, 1832), 1: viii; subsequently *C.T.S.N.*; there, Harriet notes in her preface, that, after the first volume she wrote had enjoyed some success, her elder sister stepped forward by a "previous arrangement" and wrote "The Young Lady's Tale," "The Two Emilys" and "The Clergyman's Tale, Pembroke," as well as the introduction (*C.T.S.N.* 1: vi).

<sup>174</sup>"*Canterbury Tales for the Year 1797.\** By Harriet Lee. 8vo. 6s. Boards. Robinsons. 1797. [\*Vol. I only]," Rev. of *Canterbury Tales: for the Year 1797*, by Harriet and Sophia Lee, *Critical Review /JAS* n.s. 22 (1798): 170 - 173, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=109>, quoted from 171; subsequently "*Canterbury Tales for the Year 1797.\**"

<sup>175</sup>Sophia Lee, *The Life of a Lover. In a Series of Letters*, 6 vols (London: Robinson, 1804), vi; subsequently *Life*.

similar to the radical novels of the 1790s. Its heroine, Cecilia, experiences the weight of convention in the same way that Lee's heroines experience the pressures of history in *The Recess*. Indeed, the novel's endorsement of sentiment was felt by some of the reviewers of this lengthy epistolary novel to be indelicate. *The Monthly Review*, for example, notes disapprovingly the heroine's theft of a miniature and criticises Lee for at one point implying that virtue only gets its reward in the next world:

We must now proceed to observe that there are many instances in this work, in which the libertine turn of thought and conduct of certain personages introduced in the narrative is painted with more force and precision than become the delicacy [sic] of a female writer . . . We do not even consider it as delicate in a female to admit such an expression as this: 'The restless irresolution of unsatisfied love.'<sup>176</sup>

Lee's sentimental novel is in some respects a rewriting of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), which later influenced Godwin's *Fleetwood* (1805).<sup>177</sup> In *La Nouvelle Héloïse* St. Preux, a male tutor, seduces the youthful and unmarried Eloisa who subsequently marries her father's choice of husband, Wolmar, to whom she remains loyal. In *The Life of a Lover*, by contrast, the governess falls in love with her employer, the married Lord Westbury; no physical infidelity occurs between Cecilia and Lord Westbury. When the first Lady Westbury conveniently dies of a chill caught in the frivolous pursuit of pleasure, her death is followed, not by the couple's marriage, but by jealousy and separation. Westbury and Cecilia eventually marry and Cecilia loves Westbury with a fervency that Eloisa does not feel for Wolmar. Nevertheless, the marriage lacks the tranquil but melancholy domesticity of Rousseau's novel. Thus, despite the reviewer's unease and the sexual portrayal of

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<sup>176</sup> "Art. III. *The Life of a Lover. In a Series of Letters*. By Sophia Lee. 6 vols. 12 mo. 11l. 6s. Boards.

Robinsons," Rev. of *The Life of a Lover. In a Series of Letters*, *The Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal, Enlarged* (1804): 359 – 66, quoted from 359 - 60.

<sup>177</sup> See William Godwin, *Fleetwood: Or, the New Man of Feeling*, 1805, *Standard Novels* 22 (London: Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Dublin: Cumming; Paris: Galignani, 1832);

the lovers' pre-marital desires, the novel only touches upon the more shocking elements of the tradition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The novel's emphasis on sentiment and self-expression is similar to that in Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and it is entirely possible that, if Lee wrote *The Life of a Lover* in her youth, she later adapted it to correspond with succeeding literary trends. Hays' heroine ignores decorum and morality to pursue the man she loves, only eventually to discover that he is married.<sup>178</sup> Cecilia is not as transgressive as Emma Courtney, but she is clearly an attempt to rewrite Rousseau's heroines, Julie and Sophie. By making Cecilia rather than her lover the tutor, and by showing the foolishness and empty-headed consumerism of the poorly educated first Lady Westbury, Lee emphasises the significance of rationality to women. At the same time, as in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, extreme importance is placed on sensibility. The novel is, however, in too emotional a strain to have the pedagogic pretensions of Elizabeth Griffith's sentimental novel, *The Delicate Distress* (1769), which explores a wife's fears of her husband's infidelity after marriage.<sup>179</sup> Instead, *The Life of a Lover's* examination of the constraints placed on sensibility and female sexuality makes it not a didactic but an exploratory novel and thus related to the novel of ideas.<sup>180</sup>

The Lees' work thus has a political impetus, and this in turn has consequences for their aesthetic values, leading them to emphasise the emotional, the fractured and the personal. Indeed, an examination of the Lees' writing indicates that there is a case for questioning Anne Mellor's claim that in contradistinction to the six most canonical male Romantic poets (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and

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see also the adaption of Rousseau's novel, Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné, a Tale. In a Series of Letters*, 2 vols (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1777).

<sup>178</sup>Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford: World's Classics-Oxford UP, 1996).

<sup>179</sup>Elizabeth Griffith, *The Delicate Distress* (1769), ed. Cynthia Booth Ricciardi and Susan Staves (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997); fortunately, in this novel the crisis passes without the husband succumbing to the wiles of his would-be mistress.

<sup>180</sup>On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1807 Sophia Lee's play *The Assignment* was put on at Drury Lane; in 1810 *Ormond; Or, the Debauchee* also appeared under her name but is unlikely to be hers (Napier 306); see "Biography: Miss Sophia Lee,," "The Late Miss Sophia Lee," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine /JAS* 15 (1824): 476, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=174>; while Sophia Lee's obituary in the *Literary Chronicle* names "Ormond," a novel, as hers, the obituary in



Byron): “For the most part Romantic women writers forswore their male peers’ concern with the capacities and value of the creative imagination [. . .] celebrated not the achievements of genius nor the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”<sup>181</sup>

Mellor uses Reeve’s *The Progress of Romance* as a test case and, indeed, in Reeve’s novels as well as her critical and educational writings, the main emphasis is on tradition. This is, however, partly a function of Reeve’s political position and the Lees (though admittedly outside Mellor’s remit) adopt a contrasting attitude. The Lees’ writing also provides an opportunity to flesh out Mellor’s case by indicating why, with the exception of Wollstonecraft’s 1797 essay “On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature,” it *is* so rare for female critics to argue in favour of genius or celebrate the overflow of powerful feelings. For the Lees, as arguably for Shelley in *Frankenstein*, the pressure placed on individual to conform, or to be removed from the narrative, generates “powerful feelings” of terror which are anything but a cause for celebration. However, the Lees do not only examine how public narratives and formal discourses might pressure the individual into terror. As I will show, their work also demonstrates the weaknesses and failings of formal and authoritative discourses. The next section examines how their disrespectful approach to (literary) history is an invitation to “re-member” society, that is, to take account of individuals who are culturally disenfranchised.

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*Blackwell’s Edinburgh Magazine* does not mention it, but insists that those writings recorded “are all the works she ever published” (476).

<sup>181</sup> Anne K. Mellor, “A Criticism of their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics,” in John Beer, ed. *Questioning Romanticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP) 29 – 48, quoted from 31.

## ii. "All can feel." Forgetting Authority, Re-membering Emotion<sup>182</sup>

The combination of history and "heroic romance" in *The Recess* caused a dismay similar to that generated by the second preface to *The Castle of Otranto*. Considering Walpole's account, the *Monthly Review* had been offended by the reintroduction "in a cultivated period of learning" of "the barbarous superstitions of Gothic devilism."<sup>183</sup> Significantly, the Enlightenment sense of progress which was offended by such gothicism was also affronted by the use of history in *The Recess*, which was described by the *Monthly Review* for 1786 as:

a novel in which fiction is indeed too lavishly employed to heighten and embellish some well-known and distinguished facts in the English history, - we say *too lavishly*, because the mind is ever divided and distracted when the fact so little accords with the fiction, and Romance and History are at perpetual variance with one another.<sup>184</sup>

As the *Monthly Review*'s criticism indicates, the terrors of *The Recess* are not supernatural (the only incident in which the supernatural is evoked is when the sleepwalking Ellinor is mistaken for a spectre by Queen Elizabeth). Instead, in *The Recess* the force of history and public narrative are themselves used to generate the terror of the gothic. The main cause of the reviewer's dismay, however, is not the pressure exerted on the individual by such discourses, but the threat to history itself. In *The Recess* Sophia Lee indicates why "skepticism about the possibility of writing [. . .] history" and suspicion of aesthetic disinterestedness are 'sensible' options. As will also be seen, in *The Canterbury Tales* both sisters cast doubt on literary and national stereotypes (Richter 11). In doing so, the Lees call for a re-evaluation of the cultural inclusion of the disempowered individual.

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<sup>182</sup>Anna Letitia Aikin [Barbauld], "On Romances, an Imitation" in *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* 39 – 58, quoted from 42; see also University of Pennsylvania, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2000, <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Romantic/barbauldessays.html#romances>.

<sup>183</sup>Rev. of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *Monthly Review or Literary Journal* 32 (1765): 394.

<sup>184</sup>"Art. 12. *The Recess*. By Sophia Lee," rev. *The Recess* by Sophia Lee, *Monthly Review or Literary Journal* 75 (1786): 131 – 36, quoted from 134.

While critics have continually brought into question the role that history plays in *The Recess*, until recently they have been reluctant to concede that Lee's use of it was anything other than incompetent. Barbara MacCarthy, for example, highlights the novel's historical nature in *The Female Pen* and, mentioning its influence on *Kenilworth*, comments: "Genius can find an inspiration in the most unexpected and even worthless material. That *The Recess* is worthless there is little doubt" (MacCarthy 142). Her condemnation stems partly from the fact that *The Recess* contains "no attempt to create the atmosphere of Elizabethan times, or to reproduce the customs or language of the period" (MacCarthy 142). She does not attempt to justify this lack of historical veracity by contextualising it. Though, for example, she mentions the novel's "extreme lack of restraint" she does not mention the sentimental novel, as James R. Foster would later do, or the fashion for the discovery of (fake) manuscripts which grew in the later years of the eighteenth century.<sup>185</sup> In particular, MacCarthy, like Spender and, to an extent, Tompkins, does not develop the possibility that *The Recess* quite purposefully disrupts the discourse of history. This alternative is, however, suggested by later criticism. In *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (1994) Fiona Robertson, exploring the relationship between *Kenilworth* and *The Recess* in greater detail, comments:

Scott's novel seems to be much more securely 'historical' than Lee's, or at least has been accepted as such in most criticism. As a historical figure Amy Robsart is externally verifiable, which cannot be said of

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<sup>185</sup>MacCarthy 144; in 1972 J. M. S. Tompkins was rather fairer, commenting: "For some half-century there had been in England an ill-formed but highly romantic interest in the relics of the past. Poets, artists, landscape-gardeners evoked rich and vague associations from ancient structures and ruins" (Lee, *Recess* ii). Tompkins also suggests the anachronism of viewing *The Recess* as a departure from a historical form: "The historical novel's perspective has to be continually readjusted in relation to increasing knowledge of the past and to changes in contemporary culture. Each generation recreated the historical scene in relation to its own predilections" (Lee, *Recess* iii). Her suggestions about such recreations are born out by feminist discussions of *The Recess*. For example, in *Mothers of the Novel* Dale Spender describes *The Recess* as "a historical fiction [. . .] Set in the time of Queen Elizabeth, it shows signs of serious historical research and is not altogether an unlikely fiction of the period" (Spender 233). Proving Tompkins's point, she adds that in the Lees' work the increasing concern with "women's rights was reflected" (Spender 233).

Lee's notorious invention of twin daughters for Mary, Queen of Scots.

As the heroine of *Kenilworth*, however, she is deployed in a blatantly anachronistic series of events. Scott's readers may have smoothed over the joins between history and fiction in these novels, but Scott himself seems to be more interested in drawing attention to them.<sup>186</sup>

Given MacCarthy's hidden assumption that *The Recess* is worthless because it lacks a historicity which "Genius" such as Scott's would presumably provide, Robertson's observation is interesting. Her remark opens up the possibility that Lee, like Scott, was interested in drawing attention to the fissures between history and romance.

In fact, by choosing to set her story in the reign of Elizabeth I, Sophia Lee was clearly concentrating upon a time particularly contested by eighteenth-century historians and iconographers. As Nicola J. Watson suggests, the multiplication of the images of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene* indicates the problem of portraying a powerful woman, who is at once the warrior head of a church, the appealing feminine leader of her country and the virgin Queen.<sup>187</sup> Watson indicates that the images provided by Spenser and by official portraiture survived in bastardised form in much later representations of Elizabeth. An examination of the histories of the next two centuries demonstrates that the character of Mary Queen of Scots was similarly disputed territory. A long-running propaganda struggle surrounded Mary's image and that of her son, as suggested by the title of Sanderson's 1656 work *A Compleat History of the Lives and Reigns of Mary Queen of Scotland and of Her Son and Successor, James the 6<sup>th</sup>, King of Scotland; and King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, the First . . . Reconciling Several Opinions, in Testimony of*

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<sup>186</sup>Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994), 7; Robertson refers to *The Recess* as the "most telling literary context for [Scott's] next novel, *Kenilworth*," and notes that Cumnor Hall bears similarity to *The Recess* in being "simultaneously house and prison" (7).

<sup>187</sup>Nicola J. Watson, "The Faerie Queene and the Afterlives of Elizabeth I," paper presented to the Staff / Student Research Seminar, Department of English Studies, Durham University, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

*Her, and Confuting Others, in Vindication of Him, against Two Scandalous Authors.*<sup>188</sup>

Later eighteenth-century accounts, although written when the threat of a Stuart invasion in Scotland was lesser and the Union more solid, did not lead to greater consensus. The two most substantial accounts, David Hume's *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* and William Robertson's *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI till His Accession to the Crown of England* differed in their interpretations of the actions of Mary and Elizabeth.<sup>189</sup> Hume placed greater emphasis on the enormity of Mary's crimes, on the statesmanship of Elizabeth and on her sympathy for Mary while Robertson includes less discussion of Mary's alleged crimes and links Elizabeth's "sagacity" with duplicity and cunning (Robertson, *H. of S.* 1: 501). Thus, for example, when the two authors discuss the way in which the Regent sought guarantees of his political safety before accusing Mary of murder, they treat Elizabeth's actions differently. Hume writes:

The Queen, meanwhile, gave a satisfactory answer to all Murray's demands, and declared, that though she wished and hoped, from the present inquiry, to be entirely convinced of Mary's innocence, yet, if the event should prove contrary, and that Princess should appear guilty of her husband's murder, she should, for her own part, deem her ever after unworthy of a throne. (*H. of E.* 139 - 40)

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<sup>188</sup>William A. Sanderson, *A Compleat History of the Lives and Reigns of Mary Queen of Scotland, and of Her Son and Successor, James the Sixth, King of Scotland; And (after Queen Elizabeth King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, the First, (of Ever Blessed Memory) Reconciling Several Opinions, in Testimony of Her, and Confuting Others, in Vindication of Him, against Two Scandalous Authors* (London: Moseley, Tomlins, and Sawbridge, 1656).

<sup>189</sup>David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, vol 5 (London: Cadell; Rivington; Cuthell; Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown; Richardson; J.M. Richardson; Booker; Carpentner; Jeffrey; Baynes; Bagster; Arch; Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy; Stewart; Bohn; Sherwood, Neely and Jones; Hamilton; Ogle; Saunders; Harding, Mavor, and Lepard; Gray; Whittaker; Mason; Simpkin, and Marshall; Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen; Collingwood; Boone; Lloyd; Black and Young; Wood and Relfe; Oxford: Parker, 1823); subsequently *H. of E.*; and William Robertson, *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI. Till His Accession to the Crown of England. With a Review of the Scottish History Previous*

After Murray gives evidence, Hume's account again emphasises the Queen's justice: "BUT Elizabeth, though she had seen enough for her own satisfaction, was determined that the most eminent persons of her court should also be acquainted with these transactions, and should be convinced of the equity of her proceedings" (Hume, *H. of E* 143). Elizabeth's attempts to demonstrate her objectivity were less than clear to posterity, however. Robertson, in contrast to Hume, suggests that Elizabeth was annoyed at the delays caused by the Regent's caution:

ELIZABETH resolved that Mary should not enjoy the same advantage in the conference to be held at Westminster [ . . . ] as she foresaw that the promises with which it was necessary to allure the regent, and which it was impossible to conceal from the Scottish queen, would naturally exasperate her to a great degree, she determined to guard her more narrowly than ever; and though lord Scroop had given her no reason to distrust his vigilance or fidelity, yet because he was the duke of Norfolk's brother-in-law, she thought it proper to remove the queen as soon as possible . . . . (*H. of S.* 1: 502).

Robertson's Elizabeth is politically seductive, vicious, paranoid and uninterested in the reality or otherwise of Mary's guilt. At this point, the emphasis of the two historians is strikingly different but, as Mary's execution moves closer, their interpretations begin to converge. Hume treats Mary less harshly and Robertson finds Elizabeth less repugnant, neutralising the greatest moment of friction in the narratives of national history.

However, although tamed and removed to the sphere of history rather than politics, Elizabeth's treatment of Mary still continued to cause controversy. Historians and the construction of history began to come into question alongside the character of Mary, as demonstrated by William Tytler's *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots. And an Examination of the*

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*to that Period; And an Appendix Containing Original Papers*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed., 2 vols (London: Cadell, 1794); subsequently *H. of S.*

*Histories of Dr. Robertson and Mr Hume, with Respect to that Evidence* (1772).<sup>190</sup>

Eventually, with writings such as *Critical Observations Concerning the Scottish Historians Hume, Stuart, and Robertson: Including an Idea of the Reign of Mary Queen of Scots, as a Portion of History; Specimens of the Histories of this Princess, by Dr Stuart and Dr Robertson; And a Comparative View of the Merits of these Rival Historians: With a Literary Picture of Dr. Robertson, in a Contrasted Opposition with the Celebrated Mr Hume* (1813), the characters of Hume and Robertson themselves become afflicted by the kind of radical instability that effects the personalities of Mary and Elizabeth.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, when Lee wrote *The Recess* she chose to describe a period bitterly contested by eighteenth-century nationalists and historians. Further, the relation of Lee's frequently sentimental text to such contested histories is troubled. Lewis suggests that Lee is presumably referring to Hume in the Advertisement when she writes that "the line of which [her invented heroines] came has been marked by an eminent historian" and notes that Lee's characters include a "devious and tyrannical Elizabeth Tudor" who "manifest[s] the personality traits that had become canonical through the many histories of Elizabeth's reign that had appeared since her death" (Lee, *Recess* n.pag ; Lewis 172). However, while Lee's Elizabeth is tyrannical, she is much closer in this to Robertson's Elizabeth than to Hume's.

Competing accounts of "cultural consolidation" and regional difference surrounded Mary, the interpretation changing with the narrator's political, national and religious viewpoint. Sophia Lee's choice of a new history of the children of Mary Queen of Scots was therefore both contentious and shrewd, relying on the fracture of continuous historical narrative that dogged the period. Indeed, the

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<sup>190</sup> W. Tytler, *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots. And an Examination of the Histories of Dr. Robertson and Mr Hume, with Respect to that Evidence*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: Drummond; London: Owen, Dilly, Cadell, Richardson and Urquhart, and Wilson, 1772).

<sup>191</sup> *Critical Observations Concerning the Scottish Historians Hume, Stuart, and Robertson: Including an Idea of the Reign of Mary Queen of Scots, as a Portion of History; Specimens of the Histories of this Princess, by Dr Stuart and Dr Robertson; And a Comparative View of the Merits of these Rival Historians: With a Literary Picture of Dr. Robertson, in a contrasted Opposition with the Celebrated Mr Hume* (London: Evans, 1782).

twinning and multiplication of personalities which occur in *The Recess* may be seen partly as a response to the proliferation in historical and other discourses of the narratives and personalities of Mary Queen of Scots and those around her.<sup>192</sup> The fictions of *The Recess*, purporting to be buried or illegitimate histories, threaten the coherent narratives which Hume, Robertson and others proposed. *The Recess*'s inset stories contain the discovery of true parentage so common in the sentimental novel but they also invoke parallels with the historical situation. The buried narratives are often linked with the Catholicism which partly provoked and sustained the difficulties of the Scottish queen and with the extreme sensibility which historians like Hume characterise as her downfall in the matter of Darnley and Bothwell. Thus Mrs Marlow recalls her mother:

“Bred up a Papist, she no sooner entertained a passion for Lord Scroop, than she formed a design to convert him [. . .] She thought the love of Heaven only actuated her heart, but he took advantage of those moments, and she found too late she had sacrificed her own soul's welfare to that of his: her relations, who had the more encouraged her, as my father was a great match in point of fortune, exasperated at an error they ought rather to have charged themselves with, shut her up, and treated her with the utmost rigor.” (*Recess* 1: 26 - 27)

Mrs Marlow's mother, like Hume's Mary, is “seduced by the treacherous counsels of one in whom she reposed confidence, transported by the violence of her own temper” (Hume, *H. of E.* 320). As in the story of Mary, in this narrative of religious differences, ambition and affection result in imprisonment - and also in suppression - Mrs Marlow does not know she has a brother until on the point of marrying him.

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<sup>192</sup>In an unpublished PhD dissertation *Psychosocial Spaces: Verbal/Visual readings of British Culture, 1750 - 1820* (Diss. U of Wisconsin, 1991), Steven John Gores suggests that the doubling and use of parallel in *The Recess* is linked with a vision of history as cyclical, a view allowing for “the possibility of constructing history as a support for the status quo” (170 - 74). Gores also sees evidence of history as a regime of change in *The Recess* “a past that is riven with forbidding discord and disruption” - for him the novel is ambivalent, negotiating with both versions of history (173). However, given the specific historical context of the diverging images of Mary Queen of Scots, the doubling of Matilda and Ellinor can be viewed as a comment on historiography and discord in narratives of the past.



Thus, while the “line” of Sophia Lee’s heroines may be mentioned by history, in replaying the issues surrounding Mary Queen of Scots Lee presents the possibility of other related narratives being elided. In addition, her heroine, Ellinor, suggests that even when the tale makes the history books, it may be distorted by subjectivity. Throughout Matilda’s relation Lord Leicester, though proud, was: “Impassioned, generous, good-natured, and noble, where once he was attached” (Lee, *Recess* 3: 45). Ellinor’s interpretation, however, makes him ambitious and cynical (2: 160 – 61). Lee’s fiction allows this diversification of view because of its form and use of different narrators - unlike a history, it does not have to pretend to authority. Upon the writer of history, in contrast, there is more pressure to collate evidence into a single character portrait. The divergence between histories indicates the contrived nature of this attempt at final coherence.

Similarly, Ellinor’s madness suggests the breakdown of subjectivity, periods when no narrative at all is possible. Other fissures of the narrative occur at moments of extreme emotion, when, in sentimental fashion, the nervous system responds with blushes or tears. When strong feeling is to be communicated in *The Recess*, the language is fractured, its new, disrupted structure embodying the emotion. This is rather different from the way language is commonly assumed to be used in Enlightenment modes of history, where no time is allowed for the embodiment of emotion because of the continuous narrative, or, as Lewis suggests (using Hume’s words slightly out of context), a “great chain of causes” (Lewis 172). In her advertisement to the 1783 first edition of *The Recess* Lee also suggests that history is limited when describing motivation: “History, like painting, only perpetuates the striking features of the mind; whereas the best and worst actions of princes often proceed from partialities and prejudices, which live in their hearts and are buried with them.”<sup>193</sup> Lee seems at first to hint that the demands of history as a form are responsible for the omission - perhaps it records only “the striking features of the

mind” because of limited space for character in a narrative of events. However, the complete sentence suggests that the limitations of history are inevitable. It fails because of a gap between event and consciousness, a gap which a narrative claiming continuity and historical authority cannot acknowledge and should not imaginatively fill.<sup>194</sup> In fact, Hume, for example, acknowledges the fissures and limitations of his history, but frequently in such a way as to suggest that they are of no account. He papers over the cracks almost as quickly as he reveals them, and never more so than when regarding Mary Queen of Scots. He begins to describe her in a way befitting a sentimental heroine, not only attractive but possessed of “those soft graces which compose the proper ornament of her sex” (Hume, *H. of E.* 319). However: “In order to form a just idea of her character, we set aside one part of her conduct, while she abandoned herself to the guidance of a profligate man” (Hume, *H. of E.* 319). Hume cannot gather the evidence into one coherent whole, but he only draws attention to the discrepancy to site it as a disjunction in Mary’s behaviour rather than in his text. He then seems about to offer an explanation of this character anomaly but only volunteers that her actions are “the result of an inexplicable, though not uncommon,

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<sup>193</sup> *Recess* n.pag.: As Lewis also notes, in the advertisement to the second edition, Lee replaces the word “features” with “characteristics” with its suggestion of outer signs (London, 1786, n.pag).

<sup>194</sup> Lee’s comments here may be interestingly compared to Joanna Baillie’s in her introductory discourse to *A Series of Plays: In which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind. Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (1798), *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789 – 1834, A Series of Facsimile Reprints* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1990). She writes: “The historian points back to the men of other ages, and from the gradually clearing mist in which they are first discovered, like the mountains of a far distant land, the generations of the world are displayed to our mind’s eye in grand and regular procession. But the transactions of men become interesting to us only as we are made acquainted with men themselves. Great and bloody battles are to us battles fought in the moon, if it is not impressed upon our minds, by some circumstances attending them, that men subject to like weaknesses and passions with ourselves, were the combatants” (15 – 16). Like Lee, then, she emphasises the need for the personal and public to go hand in hand if narratives of history are to be instructive. Further, with her simile of mist clearing round mountains, she suggests, like Lee, that history is full of hiatuses, which, her imagery dictates, may have the sublime of obscurity but are nonetheless sterile and uninspiring unless accompanied, not by the fusing power of imagination, but by an intimate knowledge. Baillie also insists that the desire minutely to observe men’s minds and behaviour directs even the most insipid observations but that it is difficult to explore fully a range of human behaviours for a variety of reasons - because we may not be able to talk reasonably about what has been seen, because certain situations are inaccessible to us, or because motivations may be concealed. For Baillie, interested primarily in the human condition rather than in history, it is not just history that is full of gaps in meaning but the events of life itself which fail to yield information. Her drama attempts to counter some of this deficiency. This view of history as

inconstancy in the human mind” (Hume, *H. of E.* 319). Later still, he adds: “An enumeration of her qualities might carry the appearance of a panegyric; an account of her conduct must in some parts wear the aspect of severe satire and invective.”<sup>195</sup> Hume’s history, then, contains descriptions that are close to the sentimental, and as fractured as *The Recess*. However, the tendency in Hume’s writing is predominantly toward an impression of narrative unity. *The Recess*, by contrast, draws attention to the kind of gaps which Enlightenment historiography often disguises. Like the documentation used to prove Mary’s guilt, it is fragmentary and it encourages distrust in the narratives it contains.

History is not the only discourse which is questioned by *The Recess*. The novel’s sentimentality also provides a way of viewing art that is far from the kind of detachment associated with correct aesthetic appreciation by many leading thinkers of the eighteenth century. The very title of Hume’s essay “The Standard of Taste,” for example, suggests an emptying out of personal, specific judgments in favour of a culturally accepted norm. In the essay Hume acknowledges that:

notwithstanding all our endeavours to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men, there still remain two sources of variation . . . The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country. The general principles of taste are uniform in human nature: Where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked. (Hume, *Essays* 243)

Cultural differences, similarly, can be made “allowance” for, that is, discounted from our judgment of the work of art in question (Hume, *Essays* 246). As Bromwich notes of Hume in *A Choice of Inheritance* (1989): “He was saying that in questions about taste, coherence of judgment is both desirable and attainable within a

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valuable for the experience it provides of the human character is also promoted by Joanna Baillie’s friend, Elizabeth Hamilton.

<sup>195</sup> (Hume, *H. of E.* 320); Hume’s frustration at the lack of unity seems apparent, but the complicated roles the Queen is required to play in national ideology demand this. In *The*

culture.”<sup>196</sup> The standard operates within a given society, and when judgments are extended to artifacts outside that group certain particularities should be disregarded. Significantly, Hume finds the Roman Catholic religion rather lacking in the ability to do as he recommends. It “inspire[s] a violent hatred of every other worship.”<sup>197</sup>

While Hume’s standard allows for but minimises the role of the individual humour in appreciating art, *The Recess* emphasises the legitimacy of such particularity as a response and, rather than viewing it as solipsistic, suggests that such a response may be communicated through empathy. It is not, however, that the characters display particular personal predilections for the sublime or the comic (something Hume accepts). It is that they value the art because it portrays someone they are drawn to or love. The importance of such personal involvement is highlighted in *The Recess* when Ellinor, who has been coerced into marrying the jealous Lord Arundel, sees her true love, Essex, first in a painting and then in the flesh. Ellinor describes the popularity of the portrait:

everyone pronounced it the finest ever drawn. It attracted the curiosity of all ranks of people [. . .] It was so much the topic of discourse, that fashion must have excited a desire in me to see it, had my heart been uninterested. (Lee, *Recess* 2:288)

The observer’s motivations are potentially complex, demonstrating that the aesthetic experience is not isolated but mingles with and is heightened by other emotions. This argument is emphasised by the bodily appearance of the portrait’s subject, Ellinor’s lover, after she gazes at the picture (Lee, *Recess* 2: 291).

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*Recess*, on the other hand, Lee is able to present Mary coherently, though it is perhaps significant that she is only seen at a distance, even by her daughters.

<sup>196</sup>David. Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (London: Harvard UP, 1989), 11. Bromwich goes on to explain that he uses the word ‘culture’ rather than society in order to suggest “what Hume was thinking of,” but he points out the result is rather circular “since on [Hume’s] view there is never a culture without some such coherence” (11).

<sup>197</sup>Hume, *Essays* 247; Hume has just commented: “No religious principles can ever be imputed as a fault to any poet, while they remain merely principles, and take not such strong possession of his heart, as to lay him under the imputation of *bigotry* or *superstition*,” behaviours frequently associated with the Roman Catholic religion in the gothic novel (*Essays* 247).

In its challenge to aesthetic disinterestedness, *The Recess* exploits the eighteenth-century debate about the significance and value of the history painting against that of the portrait. Reynolds had emphasised the superior moral and civic value of the history painting yet, since commercial demand dictated that he paint portraits, he attempted to retain some of these values by allegorising his subjects. Gainsborough, on the other hand, argued in favour of informal conversation pieces. As Flint remarks, the concern with portraiture indicates an anxiety about the family's conception of itself and its "concern with the troubling exchange between private experience and public performance."<sup>198</sup> In particular, the increasing interest in portraiture rather than history painting proved a worry to some commentators who saw it as evidence that civic virtue was failing before selfish and particularised commerciality.

It was the portrait's association with changing notions of social structure and responsibility that made it such an important symbol in the gothic novel. In *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, the portrait of the grandfather offers a serio-comic warning that the legitimate heir will be restored. In *The Recess*, however, the boundaries between public history and individual portraiture are blurred and the emphasis is placed on sentiment, rather than civic virtue, as a guide to social behaviour. *The Recess* disturbs the notion of clear borders between history and portraiture; its history painting of Lord Essex is placed in an exaggeratedly sentimental context, while the apparently private portraits in the recess are simultaneously parental and historical figures to the heroines. The portraits which disguise the exit from the recess are of Mary Queen of Scots, to whom Matilda is identical, and the Duke of Norfolk, whom Ellinor resembles, and these visual indicators cause a surprising intuitive reaction in the sisters:

Eleanor readily invented a ludicrous story upon the portrait of an old man, which made us both laugh heartily. I turned my eyes to consider

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<sup>198</sup>Christopher Flint, "'The Family Piece': Oliver Goldsmith and the Politics of the Everyday in Eighteenth-Century Domestic Portraiture," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996): 127 -

what I should say about the next; it was the figure of a man of noble mien [ . . . ] A sentiment of veneration, mingled with a surprisingly softness, pierced my soul at once; my tongue faltered with a nameless idea, and I rested my head against the shoulder of my sister. (Lee, *Recess* 1: 7 - 8)

The portrait is not only a social but an emotional indicator of heritage. Moreover, though such intuitions mean Matilda and Ellinor's appreciation of the portrait is not disinterested, they are drawn, not by self-interest caused by property and not even, initially, by love, but by something "nameless," an instinctive reaction reminiscent of Shaftesbury's innate moral sense. *The Recess*'s account of portraiture argues that the civic guides to morality connected with patrician disinterestedness have been replaced by sentiment.

The portrait (and also miniatures such as that hung around Ellinor's neck) were fashionable in the Elizabethan period, with those painted for state purposes obviously having a propaganda function far removed from disinterested detachment. The portraits in *The Recess*, however, replace both the covert ideology of disinterested appreciation and the more blatant purpose of propaganda with an instinctive avowal of personal interest. An interest in portraiture is also demonstrated at the end of the century by Ann Radcliffe's descriptions of the portraits at Hardwick. In *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany, with a return down the Rhine: to Which Are Added Observations during a Tour to the Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland* (1795) Radcliffe records of the supposed site of Mary's imprisonment:

On the other side of the mansion, a grand gallery occupies the length of the whole front, which is 165 feet, and contains many portraits, now placed carelessly on chairs, or the floor; amongst them an head of Sir Thomas More, apparently very fine; heads of Henries the Fourth, Seventh and Eighth; a portrait of Lady Jane Gray, meek and fair,

before a harpsichord, on which psalm-book is opened; at the bottom of the gallery, Elizabeth, slyly proud and meanly violent; and, at the top, Mary, in black, taken a short time before her death, her countenance much faded, deeply marked by indignation and grief, and reduced as if to the spectre of herself, frowning with suspicion upon all who approached it; the black eyes looking out from their corners, thin lips, somewhat aquiline nose and beautiful chin. (Radcliffe, *Journey* 375)

Apart from Radcliffe's comment that the head of Sir Thomas More is "apparently very fine" there is no remark on the technique or manner of portraiture (Radcliffe, *Journey* 375). It is the personality of those involved in the succession which interests Radcliffe. In contrast to Sophia Lee, her descriptions are neither calculated to generate the questioning of historiography nor aesthetic disinterest. Instead, they are more simply designed to provoke an emotional reaction.<sup>199</sup>

In fact, while the *Journey* is part of the new trend towards emotional historiography outlined by Kelly in "Feminine Romanticism," it does not question the discourse of history or the relation of taste to sentiment in the way that *The Recess* does. In this, Lee is also far more radical than Reeve. Reeve's novel, *The Old English Baron*, had emphasised the importance of maintaining a correct narrative of

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<sup>199</sup>The portrait gained in respectability, its hubris no longer seen as a threat to civic virtue, though the sentiment that was associated with it was still the target of some suspicion. For example, in *Helen* (1834) it is no longer associated with self-centred, unwise consumerism but is seen as an asset to be retained. The novel's hero, Beauclerc, determines to help his indigent friend, but visiting his estate in the Old Forest finds it deserted and dilapidated. Beltraver's estate is an English example of the ruined castles owned by continental villains found in the gothic novel. As such, like General Tilney's abrupt eviction of Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, it ignores displaced gothic horrors to comment on social customs nearer home. The episode's significance here, however, is that Edgeworth uses the picture gallery to suggest the extent of Beltraver's moral worthlessness and his abandonment of English responsibilities. Underlining his neglect of his inheritance, it contains "only one old daub of a grandmother [. . .] all the rest had been sold, and their vacant places remained discoloured on the walls" (Edgeworth, *Helen* 99). For Austen, attention to the portrait is accompanied by a mocking awareness of the dangers of the sensibility previously associated with it. In *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy's portrait gallery, like his library, prove him to be an excellent landowner, but Elizabeth is far more interested in Georgiana's watercolours, Wickham's miniature and the smiling picture of Fitzwilliam himself. The subjective character of response to portrait is further emphasised in *Emma*. The portrait of Harriet Smith is used to provoke an amusing variety of response, warning about the subjectivity of interpretation. Perhaps significantly, the episode is not about the drawing of aristocrats by an artist but the painting of an illegitimate girl by an amateur painter, her friend. A jest at the expense of the

inheritance, which places the legitimate ruler firmly in power. In *The Progress of Romance*, however, published two years after the first volume of *The Recess*, Reeve was willing to suggest weaknesses in the narratives of history and literary criticism. This enabled her to explore the potential of women as aesthetic subjects. However, she retained her emphasis on the need for fixity of rank and continued to use romance imagery as a source of authority. In contrast, Sophia Lee's more radical experiments with portraiture and the narratives of history are connected not just with the exploration of women as aesthetic subjects, but with a wider questioning of national identity and social makeup. As will be discussed, this is particularly evident when the two sisters work on *The Canterbury Tales*, but it can also be seen in *The Recess* and in *A Hermit's Tale*.

In privileging the emotional, fractured and subjective, *The Recess* is promoting a mode of experience often aligned with the feminine. Naomi Schor notes the long-standing association of the feminine with the particular in *Reading in Detail; Hegel's Aesthetics and the Feminine*, and certainly the connection between detail and the feminine would have been a feature of eighteenth-century thought.<sup>200</sup> If the particular and the detailed were seen as particularly suitable to women, however, they were used by women as a place of resistance and display as well as of confinement. Sophia Lee's invocation of the particular and the subjective in *The Recess* was no less complicated. Though *The Recess* concentrated on the particular, it by no means suggested that it was inadequate alongside the triumphant generalisation. First, *The Recess's* use of detail against a background of history makes conspicuous, as has been seen, the limitations of the historicising method. Secondly, *The Recess* does not connect such responses solely with women. Though

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kind of portraiture Radcliffe admires at Hardwick, this episode mockingly removes the issues of inheritance and history surrounding portraiture, and emphasises the subjective.

<sup>200</sup> Naomi Schor, "Reading in Detail: Hegel's Aesthetics and the Feminine," *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (University Park, Pa.: Penn. St. UP, 1996) 119 – 48, quoted from 121; Schor observes: "Throughout the history of Western philosophy woman has been associated with (devalorized) nature. Both as social being and as individual she is seen as more embedded in the concrete and the particular than man. Thus, where phallogocentric categories are unchallenged *masculinity* is associated with



the narrators of the fragmentary, personal tales are female, the novel's men are just as motivated by various passions and particularities. Indeed, *The Recess*'s women often have a rather stronger sense of restraint and determination than its males, rather as Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* shows more fortitude than Valancourt while Essex and Leicester have what Rhonda Batchelor might refer to as a "feminized character."<sup>201</sup> However, Lee makes passion and particular motivation a condition of life for all her characters.

While the emphasis on the particular in *The Recess* invites speculation about its attitude to femininity, its subject matter also encourages conjecture upon its stance on nation and culture. The plot of *The Recess* deals with a fictional inheritance of an emotionally sensitive episode in the history of two countries united seventy-six years earlier. Therefore, its attitude to the culture of centre and periphery becomes important, particularly in the light of recent scholarship which re-evaluates the role of nationalism in the period. While older criticism tends to see culture moving out from the centre to the periphery in an Enlightenment narrative of civilisation, in *Bardic Nationalism* Trumpener argues that the "major new genres" of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries had "their origins in the cultural nationalism of the peripheries" (xi). Such an account makes the relation between the cultural identity (if any) of Britain and that of its constituent countries in the period seem both more intricate and more troubled than in the past. This matter of cultural identity and the nation is significant not only because of *The Recess*'s subject matter, but also because of its chronological position. *The Recess* preceded the national tales examined by Trumpener, but followed the "rise of a new mode of historical, national, and pastoral elegy"; it was not itself a national tale but it contained the fragments of one (Trumpener 43). Does *The Recess* provide encouragement to diverse local identities, or attempt to naturalise and elide cultural difference?

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*transcendence, the universal, the general or mass, and femininity is associated with immanence, the particular, the concrete, or the detail*" (121).

<sup>201</sup> Rhonda Batchelor, "The Rise and Fall of the Eighteenth Century's Authentic Feminine Voice," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 6 (1994): 347 – 68, quoted from 356; subsequently

In answering this question it is necessary to consider *The Recess*'s use of the ruin, a sign of religious and national conflict. In *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* Anne Janowitz sees the ruin in romantic poetry as an attempt at naturalising the structures representing border warfare and religious difference in Britain's history as a part of the landscape.<sup>202</sup> Ann Radcliffe's *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* provides an example. While in Holland, the Radcliffes hear explosions and see soldiers, but on return to England, in contrast, observe:

Gentle hills, swelling all round from the water, green with woods, or cultivation, and speckled with towns and villages, with now and then the towers of an old fortress, offered a landscape particularly cheering to eyes accustomed to the monotonous flatness of Dutch views. (Radcliffe, *Journey* 370)

English fortresses are, it seems, like English hills, not threatening or terrible, but a harmonious part of the landscape. The "swelling" scenery itself suggests the conflicts or gradation of ranks, while the flatness of Holland corresponds with that frequent eighteenth-century English image of that country as a workaday mercantile society. However, it is a society now afflicted by warfare. While the struggle for territory persists on the continent, within Britain the castles are symbols of battles long over. The only exception Radcliffe hints at is in her lengthy description of Hardwick, supposed site of the imprisonment of Mary Queen of Scots, significantly not a ruin.

To some extent, Radcliffe naturalises the ruin and the conflicts it represents. However, the historical wound represented by Mary Queen of Scots seems less well healed, even in this 1795 text. Similar difficulties appear in *The Recess* ten years before. For concealment the recess is built beneath a ruined monastery. Its entrance is disguised by the aesthetically unpleasant tomb of a knight, guarded by the spectre

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Batchelor; Batchelor uses this expression to refer to Porter's Wallace in *The Scottish Chiefs*, who, she claims, relies on his sentiments to validate his actions (356).

of religious warfare or persecution. The recess beneath, however, is an initially safe, if secluded, place for the secret offspring of Mary. Later, it becomes a more dangerous place, inhabited by cutthroats in search of revenge. As Steven John Gores notes: “By picturing the ruined convent both in the frontispiece and in verbal descriptions, *The Recess* reinforces the image of history as at once a space of safety and of menace” (122). The ruin in *The Recess* cannot be seen as a site of cultural consolidation - it is not a naturalised relic of history but at once a shelter and a source of dissent. Like past events themselves, it does not lie undisturbed, but is revisited by the present.

Gores sees such presentations of ruins as arguably “ambivalent,” pointing “both to the possibility of constructing history as a support for the status quo and to a past that is riven with forbidding discord and disruption” (122). However, it is possible to see *The Recess* as experimenting with the notion of the past and national identity rather than being ambivalent. Its status as fiction allowed it to play with historical events relatively free from the desire for cultural consolidation that might haunt a lowland Scotsman writing a history of England, such as Hume. The novel’s rejection of standardised historical narrative is also interesting given the civilising value ascribed to Enlightenment historiography. In some ways *The Recess* represents a moderated version of what James Mill was to find so inadequate about Indian history:

To the monstrous period of years which the legends of the Hindus involve, they ascribe events the most extravagant and unnatural; events not even connected in chronological series; a number of independent and incredible fictions.<sup>203</sup>

Mill was suggesting the replacement of such narratives by one more coherent and probable, a narrative sharing the techniques of Enlightenment historiography, and

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<sup>202</sup> Anne Janowitz, *England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>203</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, abridged, ed. William Thomas (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago P, 1975), 33 – 34; see also Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 1.

enabling Indian history to fit into a newly written and imperialist version of world history. On the other hand, *The Recess*, twenty years earlier, is fictionalising an episode already tackled by historians. It reintroduces “extravagant” events (though their extravagance lies in their corruption of history rather than in any use of the supernatural). Most significantly of all, it does not suggest that this mode of narrative is inadequate or primitive. The main dichotomy set up is not between the civilised centre and uncivilised periphery, even when Ellinor suggests the primitive conditions in Ireland. This is because *The Recess* frequently focuses on the divide between the private world and the public, the internal and the external, making all locations outside *The Recess* potentially threatening ‘others,’ whether that other is Elizabeth’s court, a French monastery, an island in the West Indies, or Ireland. The novel suggests that national history is inadequate and calls for the recognition and inclusion both of emotion and of new aesthetic subjects.

This is highlighted by its treatment of Elizabethan literature. Referring to Elizabeth’s visit to Kenilworth, the novel draws attention to the culture of propaganda surrounding the Queen and criticises her vanity. In *The Recess* Elizabeth’s treatment of art is made to exhibit the corrupt taste of self-centred consumerism, as she arranges the homage of her subjects (1: 204 – 205). The vices which earlier in the century were associated with the middle class use of art have here been transferred to the aristocracy. In contrast, the disempowered sisters are the creators of an almost paradoxically private and domestic art, as the scene when they play unseen for Elizabeth’s court indicates (1: 201). The sisters only agree to play if their identity is concealed, but the Queen demands their unveiling, at once showing her tyrannical nature and conveniently facilitating the display of a supposedly private art (1: 201 – 202). Matilda and Ellinor represent the archetypal domestic woman whose ornamental education is designed for display but who must not appear to perform too blatantly.

As with the novel’s treatment of portraiture, this episode highlights the troubled relation of supposedly private art to the public. Such supposedly private art

has an ideological purpose that requires display and yet that, if exposed too blatantly, threatens to destroy the very qualities for which the art is prized. Indeed, much of the pressure placed on the sisters is generated by the fruitless but persecuting struggle to separate the public from the private, the historical from the domestic and the aesthetic from the personal. By invoking a version of Elizabethan literary heritage, albeit playfully, Lee highlights this conflict and the confinement it causes to the individual, while suggesting the need to recognise the influence of the emotional, personal and feminine upon such national literature.

Sophia Lee's much shorter narrative, *A Hermit's Tale*, set in the reign of Richard the Lionheart, similarly calls for the moderation of the national tale by the domestic and emotional. The tale's protagonist forsakes his job of shepherd to fight for the English against the Scots, and while he is absent, his mother and homestead are destroyed. His father, the Baron, had been fighting the Crusades before his son called him:

civ

"Ah, say'st thou?'groan'd he "*holy land!*

"'Twas there my sins began;

"For thither, heedless of command,

"In early youth I ran."

cv

"Broke too the unacknowledged tie

"An humble love had made;

"And left the charm of ev'ry eye

"In infamy to fade.

In emphasising that both father and son have neglected domestic duty for military glory, Lee uses the folktale to describe a past in which national and religious conflict is not glorified but in which the domestic price of conflict is weighed up more

heavily. In *A Hermit's Tale* Lee employed a form associated with traditional folk culture, an oral form associated through the work of Gray, Macpherson and others with a lament for or call to national independence. However, Lee's insistence on the primacy of domestic responsibilities is different from Gray's "The Bard," for example, where the emphasis is on national heritage.<sup>204</sup> It may also be distinguished from Macpherson, whose poetry laments broken ties between lovers or between parent and child, but does not explicitly attack the code of honour which causes such divisions nor concern itself with domesticity.<sup>205</sup> In fact, the folk tradition which Lee invokes in *A Hermit's Tale* challenges more glorified narratives of national strife in the same way that the subjective narratives of *The Recess* challenge more historically and aesthetically authoritative readings.

Like *A Hermit's Tale*, *The Canterbury Tales* also explores the elements which go "unacknowledged" in public narratives which often involve national issues. The title itself, with its invocation of English literary tradition and the English language, indicates this. Dryden had said in his Preface to the *Fables* (1700) that "from Chaucer the purity of the English tongue began" while Addison also discusses Chaucer's part in the development of the language in "An Account of the Greatest English Poets."<sup>206</sup> Addison, while praising Chaucer, notes the changing use of English:

Till Chaucer first, the merry bard, arose,  
And many a story told in rhyme and prose.  
  
But age has rusted what the poet writ,

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<sup>204</sup> See Roger Lonsdale, ed. *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith* (London: Longmans, 1969), especially 177 – 200.

<sup>205</sup> James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill, introd. Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996).

<sup>206</sup> See [Morell], ed. *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer, in the Original, from the Most Authentic Manuscripts; And as They are Turn'd into Modern Language by Mr Dryden, Mr. Pope, and Other Eminent Hands. With References to Authors, Ancient and Modern; Various Readings, and Explanatory Note* (London: printed for the editors [Morell], sold by Walthoe, Bickerton, and Payne, 1737), 16; Addison, *Works* 1: 22 – 27; for a further discussion see Eric Miner, "Chaucer in Dryden's *Fables*," *Studies In Criticism and Aesthetics 1660 – 1800: Essays in Honour of Samuel Holt Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson and John S. Shea (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1967) 58 – 72; and William L. Alderton and Arnold

Worn out his language, and obscured his wit;  
In vain he jests in his unpolished strain,  
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain. (1: 23)

In using Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, then, the Lees were at once associating their work with a native literary tradition and with the "unpolished," the powerless and the uncultured. In particular, English was accessible to eighteenth-century women in a way Latin and Greek were not. The Lees were reaffirming the fitness of the English language but they also set this native tradition in a much wider, international context. Reflecting the romance criticism which found such tales to be "of universal growth," the Lees have several of their stories told by or about foreigners. In comparison with Chaucer's, their tales are cosmopolitan enough to suggest that a process of internationalisation has taken place which any literary or social history of England must acknowledge.

In particular, *The Canterbury Tales* uses its English literary heritage as an excuse for narrating tales of the impoverished and lower class, as well as those of women, thus allowing them a voice within the cultural discourse. This is suggested by the Shakespearean epigraph to the first volume:

A woman's story at a winter's fire,  
Authoris'd by her grandame. (*C.T.* 1: i)

The epigraph functions as a modest disclaimer but it also deliberately highlights female authorship. It provides a reminder of the importance of the often dismissed folk tale by indicating that popular culture both allows a transfer of knowledge and reinforces group identity. It suggests that folk culture has a relationship to higher status literature close enough to cause unease. In fact, the epigraph, taken from the scene where Macbeth seems the ghost of the murdered Banquo, indicates an uncanny connection between the folk tale and national tradition. Lady Macbeth scoffs at such supernatural portents:

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C. Henderson, eds. *Chaucer and Augustan Scholarship* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1970), esp. 53 – 68 and 141 - 161.

This is the very painting of your fear:

This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,

Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,

Impostors to true fear, would well become

A woman's story at a winter's fire . . . .<sup>207</sup>

Set in the context of murderous usurpation, the Lees' at first apparently modest words now suggest that *The Canterbury Tales* are not merely insignificant folk stories but relate to treachery and rebellion. A link between the spectral folk story and state intrigue has been made.

The significance of the narratives of the peasantry or lower classes, stories usually considered without prestige, is again highlighted in the fifth volume. There, the title "Canterbury Tales" is discussed in a conversation between the landlady and her refined authorial lodger. The landlady is telling her guest the story of Mary, a poor servant girl who had a child by her employer, a captain. After the child dies, she steals her former lover's legitimate son, bringing him up as her own. By a cruel irony, the captain accuses the boy, his son, of a crime and condemns him to transportation. As a result, Mary becomes insane. Despite an emphasis on social justice that makes the tale compare interestingly to Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796), the landlady is not convinced of the story's value, describing it as a Canterbury Tale.<sup>208</sup>

"Bless me, No! Who would dream of writing such an old story as that?"

"I will."

"Dear Sir, there are a hundred such in the world. Take my word for it, it will pass for a mere Canterbury Tale."

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<sup>207</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990), III. iii. 61 – 65.

<sup>208</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art* (1796), ed. Shawn L. Maurer (London: Pickering, 1997).



“With all my heart! I have not the least objection — prosing old stories are proverbially called Canterbury tales, and therefore, mine claim that title.”

(*C.T.* 5: 35)

The writer’s reply does not immediately grant the landlady’s tale much artistic merit, nor does it directly award tales about the poor cultural importance. However, though the description of the tale as a “prosing old stor[y]” might be taken as a manifestation of the kind of feminine modesty discussed by Katharine Rogers in her article “Inhibitions On Eighteenth Century Women Novelists,” the depreciating tone seems false. After all, the moment when the tale is called “prosing” is also the moment when Harriet Lee allies the work most closely with Chaucer’s own. At that instant the speaker continues: “ ‘I shall not attempt to decorate the one in question, Mrs Dixon: it shall remain your own story told, as nearly as I can recollect, in your own words’ ” (*C.T.* 5: 35). He thus firmly affiliates his story to Chaucer’s narrative approach in *The Tales*.

The Lees’ tales in fact refer not only to Chaucer’s interest in social division, but in the appropriateness of tale to teller, or literary stereotyping. The Lees invoked such stereotypes to re-examine and subvert them. In the process, they questioned the allocation of cultural and literary authority, giving credibility to figures usually denied it – the old woman, the young woman and the landlady. Their use of the literary stereotype was noted by several reviewers. The *British Critic* remarks of Sophia Lee’s the “Young Lady’s Tale” that it “is so much longer than the rest, (natural enough) as to occupy the whole of the second volume.”<sup>209</sup> The *Critical Review*, after commenting that the narrators are not sufficiently distinguished, mentions Harriet Lee’s use of the traveller who “recounts adventures which occurred in Spain” and “the Frenchman” who “lays the scene of his story in France” and also mentions “the old woman” who “introduces a spectre” and the use of proverbial Spanish jealousy in the first tale (170 – 73). The reviewers did not,

however, grasp the Lees' experimental use of such stereotypes which they often invoked only to subvert. In the 1805 "Landlady's Tale," for instance, the landlady is a far cry from her grasping equivalent in Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*. Hamilton's heartless landlady cannot understand the anti-sceptical writings of her penniless dead lodger and sells them after complaining bitterly about their worthlessness. Lee's landlady, in contrast, is herself the compassionate and understanding narrator (though within a frame narrative) of her lodger's moving story. In contrast to Hamilton's novel, then, this story uses the plight of the individual to examine the problematic nature of authority; it also culturally enfranchises the landlady, who is both able to tell the tale and aware of social injustice. In short, the story indeed provides "More last Words," (as the volume's epigraph has it) in the lengthy debate about the construction of society (5: n. pag.).

The "Old Woman's Tale" also makes problematic the very stereotype it draws upon. Like the epigraph to the first volume, it complicates the connection between the feminised folk tale and superstition. The old woman is not mentioned at the beginning of the tale which instead opens with the visit of a Baron to a priory. There, surrounded by darkness and obscurity, he first hears about the legend of Lothaire, "in consequence of [whose] donation," the abbey was founded (*C.T.* 1: 339). The Baron expresses his curiosity and the Prior associates such enthusiasm with "the age of the *Troubadours* and *Jongleurs*," adding to the peculiarity by shifting the genre from folk tale to romance (*C.T.* 1: 340). Furthermore, not only is the romance extremely obscure but its status as the tale of an old woman is made problematic. The prior shows the baron "several small rolls of vellum," "wholly unintelligible" since each has been modernised, "in every succeeding century, down to the present" (1: 340). The story read by the Baron has passed through the hands of numerous translators - ultimately, it is more the Church's story than the old woman's. This is underlined by the ending:

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<sup>209</sup> "Canterbury Tales: for the Year 1797." Rev. of *Canterbury Tales: for the Year 1797*, by Harriet and Sophia Lee. *British Critic /JAS* 12 (1798): 306. Sheffield Hallam Corvey. 25 Feb

The Baron, who had with difficulty kept awake so long over the extravagant story he had been reading, [. . .] now found his curiosity yield to the lateness of the hour [. . .] his eyes insensibly closed; he relaxed his hold – the manuscript dropped from his hand – and he fell into a profound sleep, from which he was roused – not by a ghost – but by a plump friar of the convent. (*C.T.* 1: 395 - 6)

The romance of feudalism is discredited by the tale's close, which exposes the Baron as a character of dubious taste and the abbey as the home of materialism. However, the story also connects the dubious romance and the material wealth of the abbey – the romance is presumably preserved by the abbey as the narrative of the origin of its wealth. Rather than being a straightforward account of superstition, pleasing the reader but trivialising the old woman, the tale contains a sophisticated critique of romance values.<sup>210</sup>

Similarly, Sophia Lee's "Young Lady's Tale," which the reviewer assumed invoked stereotypes of femininity, begins by exploiting the conventional and titillating imagery of female metamorphosis.<sup>211</sup> It later removes the possibility of female transformation, examining instead what happens when men have to undergo such shifts in identity. The tale is complex enough to need some summary. Sir

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2000. <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=92>.

<sup>210</sup>See also Allen W. Grove, "To Make a Long Story Short; Gothic Fragments and the Gender Politics of Incompleteness," *Studies in Short Fiction* 34 (1997): 1 – 10; Allen briefly considers "The Old Woman's Tale" when arguing that the gothic fragment's unfinished nature "invests the form with the potential to effect social commentary and change" (9); see particularly 7 – 9.

<sup>211</sup>Burke's notion of a female beauty based on deceit and transformation has already been discussed in the introduction. The relation between female beauty and metamorphosis gained a new impetus in the eighteenth century from theories of sensibility. Such theories of sensibility owed a lot to materialist psychology and the "significance of the nervous system," which Locke and Shaftesbury "could easily be read to have elevated and popularised" (Barker-Benfield 106). In Shaftesbury nerve theory was combined with a belief in "moral instinct" – "No sooner are actions viewed [. . .] than straight an inward eye distinguishes, and sees the fair and shapely [. . .] apart from the deformed or foul" (Barker-Benfield 105). For Hume sensibility involved the "incapacitating of the mind for "rougher and more boisterous emotions" (Barker-Benfield 133). The upper ranks of women, therefore, supposed to have particularly delicate nervous systems, would be closely linked with acute sensibility. In Frances Burney's *Cecilia* for example, the heroine's "countenance announced the intelligence of her mind, her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul, and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now glistened with sensibility" (6). Cecilia's alteration is in terms of facial expression; the blush is no longer a signifier of modesty alone but of a whole range of sympathetic and virtuous responses.

Edward Arden decides to marry his daughter, Emily Arden, to her cousin, the Marquis of Lennox and son of the Duke of Aberdeen. Without seeing Emily, Edward Lennox rebels against his father's choice. Nevertheless, while remaining ignorant of Emily's identity, he falls in love with her, seeing her first at a masquerade where she is disguised as an Italian peasant and later in the disguise of a Scottish crofter. As a result, he becomes Emily's husband, despite believing himself already married. In this context, Emily's transformations indicate that female identity is at risk both from the dishonourable actions of male relations and the pride of rank. The association between metamorphosis and vulnerability is made explicitly during the wedding scene :

The performers were all stopt in the hall, and the lover only admitted to the garden; where, as by magic, had arisen a straw-roofed cottage, in which appeared, in the simple garb of Scotland, the affianced bride [. . .] but to the masquers was added the fair-haired Italian peasant, whose light fingers once more swept the mandoline with inimitable grace: that pleasure past, Emily again vanished, but soon to return in the chaste elegance of her bridal dress. (*C.T.* 2: 188 - 89)

The bride is placed in a series of tableaux and, even when she performs on the mandoline, her person is part of the overall aesthetic effect. Her figure is associated with folk culture – it is the simplicity of the disempowered peasant which makes her seem attractive, not the Enlightenment traditions of Scottish thought or the writings of all classical Italy. Such commodification of culture onto the female body makes both the culture of the regions involved and femininity itself appear unthreatening.

Sophia Lee does not directly criticise the metamorphoses which Emily has to undergo to attract Edward. However, before the end of the story Emily catches smallpox, a loss of aesthetic status which emphasises her intrinsic worth (*C.T.* 2: 421). Lee also makes her hero undergo a spectacular transformation from sculpture to life. In “The Two Emilys” when Edward Lennox's prior marriage is discovered, Sir Arden attacks him. Lennox, believed dead, secretly reappears to the grieving

Emily, disguising himself, rather idiosyncratically, as the statue of a flute-playing faun. Hearing the servants playing discordantly to try to please Emily, he lures her into the garden by playing a beautiful tune from her childhood:

still the music, with more melting sweetness, invited, and fearfully she followed. On a point near the depth of the dell, the shade suddenly broke away, and disclosed the fountain, quivering to the moon it reflected. Faintly, though she knew not why she feared, Emily turned her eyes towards the statue of the Faun. Ah, God! what were her sensations, when she fancied she saw two resembling figures, one half shading the other! (*C.T.* 2: 310 - 11)

Edward, as a man who has transgressed social boundaries by contracting two marriages, regains his wife by becoming an aesthetic object. He takes the role of entertaining musician that Emily has assumed on her wedding day, and he enacts a tableau for her benefit. Demoted to a baroque form expressive of movement and transformation, Edward must forfeit the role of aesthetic subject because of his error. Thus Sophia Lee's exploration of the metamorphic beautiful indicates that it is a strategy employed by those who have little power. Emily's transformations, for example, allow her to marry Lennox successfully but they are also a sign of her vulnerability. This examination of changeable beauty suggests that it is the counterpart of the sublime of terror Lee had depicted in *The Recess*. There, Lee indicated that outside forces, acting to suppress or control the individual narrative, could produce a terrible fear. In "The Young Lady's Tale" the interrogation of the literary convention leads Lee to the conclusion that the beautiful is also a response to such external pressures, and, in particular, to patriarchal pride.

In questioning the accuracy of literary stereotypes, and the impartiality and selectivity of narrative, the Lees were both probing the efficacy of empiricism and undermining the association between probability and correct taste, as famously formulated by Johnson in *The Rambler*:

The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen [ . . . ] Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder: it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance . . . .<sup>212</sup>

The Lees call into question Johnson's category of life exhibited "in its true state" and they add to this scepticism an insistence on the importance of emotion. Their fiction enacts Barbauld's description of romance in "On Romances, An Imitation" (*Miscellaneous Pieces* 39 – 46). In her essay Barbauld (using the word "romance" in the sense of fiction) finds it an antidote to solipsistic specialism:

To follow the chain of perplexed ratiocination, to view with critical skill the airy architecture of systems, to unravel the web of sophistry, or weigh the merits of opposite hypotheses, requires perspicacity, and presupposes learning. Works of this kind, therefore, are not so well adapted to the generality of readers as familiar and colloquial composition; for few can reason, but all can feel; and many who cannot enter into an argument, may yet listen to a tale. (41 – 42)

The potential conflict between romance and empiricism is neutralised in Barbauld's picture of relaxation, where fiction merely provides a healthy anecdote to the labours of investigation or the troubles of life:

Invited by these flattering scenes, the student quits the investigation of truth, in which he perhaps meets with no less fallacy, to exhilarate his mind with new ideas, more agreeable, and more easily attained: the busy relax their attention by desultory reading, and smooth the agitation of a ruffled mind with images of peace, tranquility, and pleasure . . . . (43)

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<sup>212</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* 4 (31<sup>st</sup> March 1750), *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 3, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1969) 19 – 25, quoted from 19.

However, since even in Barbauld's account the romance urges emotional indulgence in the reader and uses empathy to challenge compartmentalisation, its usefulness for changing the political status quo is clear. By querying the privileged narratives of aesthetic detachment and historiography, and insisting on the powerful influence of the personal, particular and fragmentary, the Lees exploited this potential to the full. Their work demands a sympathetic response to the individual sufferings of the socially and culturally disempowered, but it does not stop with this call for empathy for the individual. Instead, contributing to the French Revolutionary debate, the Lees repeat the call for sympathy and reform so often that the need for amendment in the individual case becomes a call for the more general re-examination of society.

## Chapter III

### Elizabeth Hamilton

#### i. Introduction

In order to [promote] the government of the passions, it is necessary to be acquainted with their origin and progress; a species of knowledge, to be derived not so much from a view of their consequences, as from an accurate observation of their gradual development.<sup>213</sup>

In her preface to the *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina* (1804) Hamilton at once allies her text to and distinguishes it from history. She signals that her interest is not in inheritance or tradition, or even external “consequences,” but in psychology. In this, Hamilton, like her friend, Joanna Baillie, was part of a new approach towards history which Kelly calls “feminizing historiography” (“Feminine Romanticism” 4). The emphasis which Baillie and Hamilton place on the “passions” is a natural development from the sentimental historiography of the Lees. However, it is also a reaction to the associations of radicalism that had clustered around an emphasis on subjectivity. Thus, while the Lees’ work emphasises individual perspective and desire, both Hamilton and Baillie explore such emotionalism in order to control it. Like Edgeworth, Hamilton and Baillie were fascinated by the potential disciplining effects of a psychologically aware education.

Hamilton’s approach, in particular, shares some similarities with the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid and James Beattie. Like Reid, Hamilton saw a divine arrangement in the creation of man and the world around him and criticised the sceptical philosophy which she saw throwing that and other shared perceptions

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<sup>213</sup>Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus*, 3 vols (Bath: Crutwell for Robinson, 1804), ix; subsequently *Agrippina*.



into doubt. Her biographer, Benger, records that during the last six years of her life, Hamilton read “compositions of a higher order,” including Dugald Stewart, William Paley and Alison.<sup>214</sup> In October 1810 Hamilton also mentions reading Stewart’s *Philosophical Essays* (1810) (Benger 2: 141). Stewart’s *Essays* questioned scepticism before going on to explore taste, the sublime and the beautiful, in particular criticising Burke’s comments on the latter.<sup>215</sup> Stewart’s common sense approach and his doubt on the subject of Burke’s aesthetic commentary were shared by Hamilton in *A Series of Popular Essays* (1813). However, Hamilton’s interest can be traced to the publication of her first novel, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah; Written Previous to, and during the Period of His Residence in England. To Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Dissertation on the History, Religion, and Manners, of the Hindoos* (1796).<sup>216</sup> It was also in evidence in her *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) which was described by the *Monthly Mirror* as “an attempt to expose the absurdities of the modern school of philosophy, by shewing the effect of its precepts upon the conduct of its teachers and disciples.”<sup>217</sup> However, Hamilton did much more than parody such philosophy. She also replied to it, combining Scottish common sense philosophy with the associationism which had frequently been perceived as a potential threat to the stability of both personal identity and morality. In the process, she produced a version of taste far less aristocratic than many that had gone before.

Hamilton was born in Belfast on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1758. After the death of her father, she was sent to live with the Marshalls, her father’s sister and brother-in-law,

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<sup>214</sup>Elizabeth Benger, *Memoirs of the late Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton*, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1818), 1: 221; subsequently Benger.

<sup>215</sup>Dugald Stewart, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Constable; London: Hamilton, Adams, 1855), vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart, esq., F.R.SS.*, 11 vols.

<sup>216</sup>Elizabeth Hamilton, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah; Written Previous to, and during the Period of His Residence in England. To Which Is Prefixed a Preliminary Dissertation on the History, Religion, and Manners, of the Hindoos* (1796), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols (London: Crowder for Robinson, 1801); subsequently *Translation*.

<sup>217</sup>Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000); subsequently *Memoirs*; Rev. of *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, by Elizabeth Hamilton, *Monthly Mirror/ JAS* 10 (1800): 34, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000. <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=58>.

in Stirling. Hamilton was taught by a master and noted that it was then not unusual in Scotland, with boys also occasionally being taught with girls (Benger 1: 36). Hamilton then moved with the Marshalls to Bannockburn where she remained, caring for her uncle after her aunt's death in 1780. In 1786 her brother Charles returned from India to complete his translation of the *Hedaya* and, on the death of her uncle in 1788, Hamilton moved to London to live for the next two years with her sister and brother. In 1792, after a period of gradually worsening health, Charles died. Elizabeth, who in 1786 had had an essay published in *The Lounger*, was inspired by her brother's Orientalism. She began work on the *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, which, though fictional, critiques both values considered Eastern and those apparently Western.

Hamilton followed this work with *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, in which her criticism of pro-revolutionary philosophers became much more severe as she mocked passages from both Godwin's and Mary Hays's work. Alongside comment on social structure and on the "war of ideas," Hamilton emphasised the importance of a correct education. *Letters on Education* (1801), begun while Hamilton was visiting Bath for gout, similarly reflected these interests, drawing on Hamilton's reading of associationist psychology.<sup>218</sup> Hamilton's next endeavour, *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, the Wife of Germanicus* (1804), supplemented history with what she referred to as "probabilities," which reflected Agrippina's domestic life and so drew attention to the omissions of more standard histories (*Agrippina* xxxiii).<sup>219</sup> The work was, however, primarily educative, since Hamilton felt that its form, mixing fact and supposition, would make knowledge on the "origin and progress" of the passions easier to learn (*Agrippina* ix).

In the year of *Agrippina*'s publication, Hamilton moved to Edinburgh. She spent six months educating the daughter of a nobleman, thereby producing her next

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<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Letters on Education* (Bath: Crutwell for Robinson, 1801); also published as *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols (Bath: Crutwell for Robinson, 1801); subsequently *L. on E.*

publication, *Letters, Addressed to the Daughter of a Nobleman, on the Formation of Religious and Moral Principle* (1806). This too uses elements of discourses conventionally considered masculine: theology and philosophy. It deploys these within an epistolary form to emphasise the importance of self-government in matters of principle. In 1808 Hamilton wrote *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-Nook*.<sup>220</sup> Kelly remarks that the novel uses devices "characteristic of didactic writing for children for the 'lower orders', who were seen by their 'betters' as childish or childlike" (*Women, Writing, and Revolution* 20). However, the attitude to rank displayed by Hamilton was a little more complex than the apparent form of her work, an educational book for the less well-off, might suggest. Proclaiming to educate the lower orders, the work also offered lessons to those higher up the social scale, extolling Hamilton's favourite associationist psychology. In 1809 Hamilton published *Exercises in Religious Knowledge; For the Instruction of Young Persons*.<sup>221</sup> She later wrote *A Series of Popular Essays, Illustrative Principles Essentially Connected with the Improvement of the Understanding, the Imagination, and the Heart* (1813), which explored her interest in the formation of the mind more thoroughly. Although this work used the popularising term "essay" in its title, it was closer to a rather more ambitious project, a treatise on the human mind. During this period she spent three months in Ireland. In 1815 she published *Hints Addressed to the Patrons and Directors of Schools*.<sup>222</sup> The following year, despite travelling to Harrogate for her health, she died on 23<sup>rd</sup> July.

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<sup>219</sup> Hamilton distinguishes her work from history in the preface with the double-edged remark: "The employment of Agrippina's leisure hours, her domestic avocations, society, & c. were circumstances which it suited not the dignity of history to record" (1: xxxii).

<sup>220</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie; A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-Nook* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne for Manners and Miller, and Cheyne; London: Cadell and Davies, and Miller, 1808).

<sup>221</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Exercises in Religious Knowledge; For the Instruction of Young Persons* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne for Manners and Miller; London: Cadell and Davies, 1809).

<sup>222</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Hints Addressed to the Patrons and Directors of Schools; Principally Intended to Shew, That the Benefits Derived from the New Modes of Teaching May Be Increased by a Partial Adoption of the Plan of Pestalozzi; To Which Are Subjoined Examples of Questions Calculated to Excite and Exercise the Infant Mind* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815).

Critics focused upon Hamilton's part in the debate surrounding the philosophic novel and the French Revolution, and on connected questions of female behaviour. Early twentieth century criticism records Hamilton's anti-revolutionary stance, while later criticism modifies the picture, often paying attention to Hamilton as a precursor of Jane Austen. Indeed, after Austen's relation to the novelists of the 1790s was noted, the path of Hamilton criticism was partly dependent on the attention paid to Austen. This has meant that the complexities of Hamilton's work have frequently been overlooked; it has also meant that as Austen's position as rebel or reactionary has fluctuated, so, to a lesser extent, has Hamilton's. Thus, for Tompkins, writing well before the debate on Austen's relationship to revolution, Hamilton's position seems relatively simple. In *The Popular Novel in England 1770 – 1800* Tompkins notes that Hamilton has "humour, moderation, and a good word for what she found good in the works of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft" but still places Hamilton uncomplicatedly on the anti-Jacobin side of the question (319). With Marilyn Butler's work Hamilton's role remains roughly the same. Butler has a conservative Austen and mentions Hamilton briefly as an apparently similarly conservative precursor. However, she too, perhaps catching the note from Tompkins, remarks in a footnote that "it is misleading to think of her as rabidly partisan: she is shrewd and moderate in tone" (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 108). Nevertheless, Butler does little more to suggest the complexity of Hamilton's work, indicating that it grew "severer in tone."<sup>223</sup>

Later criticism offered either adjustment or challenge to Butler's views on Austen, and Hamilton's position was often found to be correspondingly altered. In "Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s," for example, Gary Kelly notes: "The opposition between Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin writers was [ . . . ] to a large extent, a false one."<sup>224</sup> Refiguring the debate in his own terms, Kelly adds that the Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin writers together represent the range of ideological attitudes

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<sup>223</sup> 111; Butler parallels this tendency in Hamilton with a similar movement in the work of George Walker and Jane West (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* 111).

of the rapidly expanding and increasingly powerful professional middle class” (“Jane Austen” 292). He then explores how Austen’s work might be interpreted in this light; however, his work has implications for Hamilton and others which he does not here examine in detail. Kelly commences more detailed exploration of Hamilton’s work in *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790 – 1827*. He suggests that in constructing a counter-revolutionary feminism, Hamilton found the dangers of experimenting with differently gendered discourses. In opposition to Butler, Kelly suggests that Hamilton “moved closer to Revolutionary feminism after 1800, resisting the increasing remasculinization of culture and restriction of women to narrowly defined spheres” (*W.W. and R.* 265). In *Unsex’ d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* Eleanor Ty goes even further, suggesting that Hamilton was much closer to radicals such as Wollstonecraft and Hays but along with other authors was “reluctant to declare [her] political affiliation with a cause which was becoming notorious.”<sup>225</sup> Later finding the political affiliations of the writers she studies apparently confused, she links the writers with Irigaray’s suggestion that women should attempt to subvert the patriarchal order through confusion. She writes:

While there may not have been concerted effort on the part of women novelists to create this type of puzzlement, the effect of the ambivalent writing I have described is, nevertheless, a kind of questioning, or even subversion. Opie, like Edgeworth, Radcliffe, and Hamilton, weaves between the Burkean and the radical beliefs, not offering her readers a single, comfortable, solid position but presenting multiple views on the subject. (*Unsex’ d* 30)

Commentators on the war of ideas have noted the difficulty involved in mapping complex political differences; as Claudia Johnson remarks in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988): “Most of the novels written in the ‘war of

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<sup>224</sup>Gary Kelly, “Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790s,” Schofield and Macheski 285 - 306, quoted from 292; subsequently “Jane Austen.”

ideas' are more complicated and less doctrinaire than modern commentators have represented."<sup>226</sup> In particular, the disagreement about Hamilton's position within the political debate of the 1790s arises partly because at times Hamilton is surprisingly sympathetic to radical thought. On the other hand, Hamilton's conservative use of the rhetoric of common sense during her disagreements with Hays and Godwin has been overlooked.<sup>227</sup> In a letter to Hays Hamilton comments upon her own early attack on sceptical philosophy in the *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*:<sup>228</sup>

In my opinion it is a strange sort of a compliment you pay your friend Mr Godwin, in taking it for granted that he has made a Monopoly of all the absurdity, and extravagance in the world; and that it is impossible to laugh at any thing ridiculous without pointing at him. Ignorant as I am, and ignorant as to the world you have declared me to be, I could point out to your perusal volume upon volume where you might see in the regions of Metaphysics fancy has taken as bold a flight and that in the rage for systemizing are those of at least as distinguished eminence have laid themselves open to ridicule. – To convince you of the truth of my assertions – I now assure you that the account of Philosopher in the Rajah, and their curious absurdities (in all of which you can only see Mr Godwin) was written before I had looked into his book.

Hamilton is eager to emphasise that it is not specifically Godwin, but those whose "fancy" has been too philosophically adventurous who are her targets. Her remark about the "systemizing" tendencies of her opponents indicates a typical common-

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<sup>225</sup>Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, 1993), 19; subsequently *Unsex'd*.

<sup>226</sup>Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1988), xxi.

<sup>227</sup>To place Hamilton correctly is certainly a difficult task; at times she seems surprisingly unfair to Godwin and Hays, yet frequently similarities can be traced between her views and Wollstonecraft's. This is particularly the case when educational matters are under consideration. Like Wollstonecraft Hamilton uses the argument of the equality of women's souls under the Christian tradition (*L. on E.* 36 - 37). Similarly to Wollstonecraft, Hamilton writes that "the woman who would educate her children with success, must begin by educating herself" (*L. on E.* 11). Additionally, in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* Hamilton names her improver and educator Mrs Mason, as Wollstonecraft had done in *Original Stories* (*Works* 4).

sense suspicion that sceptical philosophers were too detached from the practice of experience.

Indeed, in both her *Letters on Education* and the *Popular Essays* Hamilton is eager to emphasise that principles should be flexible enough to be applied to individual circumstances. In *Letters on Education* Hamilton remarks that “rules are less necessary than principles” (v). Hamilton echoes Reid who had written in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764) that while mechanics, astronomy, and optics had rules which could “universally obtain,” rules for the mind would not work; Reid nevertheless maintained a belief in “certain principles,” and these are such that “the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them;” and they “are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.”<sup>229</sup> Hamilton, however, is here mainly concerned with associationist psychology and its effect on the mind. She wishes to emphasise that in applying psychology, the flexibility of principles rather than rules is necessary. To exemplify this, she talks about an agricultural improver who, instead of systematically and indiscriminately employing the methods of the Devonshire farmer on the Grampian Hills, uses general principles (*L. on E.* vi – vii). With this reference to farming, Hamilton is suggesting that her position is as down to earth as the soil itself. In contrast, the sceptical philosophers are analogous to Repton and Brown, whose theories of landscape management neglected the local and particular in favour of generalisation. Like the over-zealous agriculturist, Hamilton implies, the systematic philosopher does not inquire into particular circumstances. She, on the other hand, wishes to use the general principles of associationist psychology which, she argues, can be tailored to the individual case. Hamilton imagines that associationism, controlled by the habit and reasoning powers of a good education,

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<sup>228</sup>Eliza[beth] Hamilton, letter to Mary Hays, 13 March 1797, microfilm RP 677, Department of Manuscripts, British Library, London.

will not develop into a capricious threat to the identity of the individual but ensure the stability of the community.

Since Hamilton herself emphasises the importance of principles rather than rules, this study, when examining her approach to aesthetics, will attempt to take into account her common-sense emphasis on practice and experience when applying principles. However, this approach is complicated by the slipperiness of Hamilton's own language. As the example above suggests, her sentences often operate on several levels, employing a kind of referential shorthand. While this prose style may owe something to her belief in associationist psychology, it can be misleading in texts like the *Essays* which might be expected to proceed along lines of more formal argumentation. Hamilton's denials of partisanship are in their very disingenuousness more complex than they appear. Hamilton knows that her *Essays* are entering into an intellectual environment where readers are acutely aware of the political implications of theories of education and the mind. Therefore, though she denies that her work has affiliation, she cannot make it ideologically neutral. Her "fresh" language can in fact only be a submerging of political rhetoric. Perhaps appropriately, then, her *Essays* begin by enacting a similar kind of denial of ideology to that which is often inherent in discussions of taste.

## ii. The Association of Ideas and the Figure of the Critic

In *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England* Martin Kallich remarks of Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762): "The influence that its associationism might have had on its many readers is interestingly attested by the suggestive evidence of Miss Elizabeth Hamilton."<sup>230</sup> He continues: "In her *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* (1801) Miss Hamilton recognizes the importance of the principles of association in the education of youth"

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<sup>229</sup>Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), ed. Timothy J. Duggan (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1970), 9 – 10, 32.



(Kallich 199). What Kallich neglects to mention is that, like many of the writers he considers, Hamilton applied the psychology of associationism to the context of critical and aesthetic theory. Her descriptions of association, it must be admitted, were influenced by Hartley and Alison, amongst others, and were not particularly original. Nevertheless, the definitions of taste, sublimity and beauty which she constructed are unexpected.

By viewing Hamilton's critical work against the background of discussion provided by theorists who used the association of ideas, it is easy to see that Hamilton is making a number of substantial changes to key terms within the vocabulary of aesthetics. This chapter departs from the current interest in Hamilton's parody and short-term reaction to the political debate of the 1790s to demonstrate that her later writing is an attempt to find solutions to the questions about (self)-government which it had raised. It will be shown that Hamilton used associationist psychology to re-define the standard of taste, the notion of the critic and the sublime and the beautiful. Hamilton's attempt to democratise taste by arguing that it stems from learnable associations is explored in this section. She proposed feminised and moral associations as representing good taste and redefined the sublime and the beautiful correspondingly. Such associations could be taught to almost everyone and, as she suggests in *The Cottagers*, could transform the community.

In applying theories concerning the association of ideas, Hamilton was entering into an eighteenth-century debate which was both lengthy and complex. The complexity stems from the different interpretations of the notion of association or connection. Locke, for example, had considered associations as disorderly accidents rather than as guiding principles of cognition, and he was followed in this distrust by Hutcheson.<sup>231</sup> On the other hand, Hobbes, who had not used the term

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<sup>230</sup>Kallich 199; Lord Henry Home Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (1762), 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Blake, 1839).

<sup>231</sup>The fourth edition of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* has a chapter on the association of ideas; see 394 – 401; 2. 33; see also Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* (1725), ed. Peter Kivy, International Archives of the History of Ideas Series Minor 9 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), in particular 75; 6. 2; subsequently *Inquiry*.

“association” but discussed connection, used the concept to explain the correct and normal working of the mind.<sup>232</sup> Hobbes was followed by Hume and Hartley who did not view association with Lockean suspicion but instead saw in it a general principle of cognition. The concept became important for critical theory; elements of it were present in Hutcheson’s work on the beautiful, while Gerard’s *Essay on Taste*, though not fully associationist, also employed its psychology.<sup>233</sup> Addison also uses it, though he is unusual in that he selects elements from both sides of the tradition. His *Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination* mingle a Lockean suspicion of association with a Hobbesian delight in it. Burke, on the other hand, denies its efficacy in “On Taste,” apparently because he sees it as a threat to the notion of a standard of taste. Inconsistently, however, he employs elements of it in an unacknowledged way in his theory of the sublime.<sup>234</sup>

While Burke saw the association of ideas as a potentially anarchic threat to the standard of taste, critics such as Kames and Gerard employed it to support key neoclassical standards. Kames, for example, used it to emphasise the importance of the unity of theme, and suggested it could support notions of the standard of taste. Elizabeth Hamilton to some extent follows Gerard and Kames in her application of associationist psychology to aesthetics, but she also seems substantially influenced

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<sup>232</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. Richard Tuck, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991); see, for example, chapter III “Of the Consequence or Trayne of Imaginations” in Part I “Of Man” (20 – 24).

<sup>233</sup>Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (1759), together with *Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1780), introd. Walter J. Hipple (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1963); subsequently *An Essay on Taste*.

<sup>234</sup>In “On Taste” Burke suggested that “the natural powers” of man, those that used data from external objects, are “the senses; the imagination; and the judgment” (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 13). He then posits that we all receive the same sensory input and that therefore its effects are unlikely to differ widely in members of the same species: “But as there will be little doubt that bodies present similar images to the whole species, it must necessarily be allowed that the pleasures and the pain which every object excites in one man, it must raise in all mankind, whilst it operates naturally, simply, and by its proper powers” (13). He later writes: “So, then as taste belongs to the imagination, its principle is the same in all men, there is no difference in the manner of their being affected, nor in the causes of the affection; but in the degree there is a difference, which arises from two causes principally; either from a greater degree of natural sensibility or from a closer and longer attention on the object” (20). In *A Philosophical Enquiry* Burke concentrates on the emotional associations which may cause an object to be considered sublime; it is only when he considers the beautiful that he returns to emphasising heavily the qualities in the objects and the emotions they produce.

by Alison, whose *Essays on the Nature and the Principles of Taste* (1790) is one of the most completely associationist accounts given of the faculty.<sup>235</sup>

Creating a more inclusive and moral variety of taste that would benefit the community as a whole, Hamilton's initial remarks on the standard of taste emphasised the importance of individual experience. Her comments recall Alison's use of the association of ideas (though Alison did not discuss the standard of taste, a fact which perhaps suggests that he felt his associationist theory allowed such a diversity of connections and experiences to contribute to the emotions of taste that no standard was possible). Similarly, when Hamilton first discusses taste, her remarks undermine the idea of a universal standard. She writes: "In order to excite that emotion [of beauty], the object must recall to our recollection some pleasurable feelings or sensations formerly experienced" (*Popular Essays* 1: 186). This emphasis on individual experience would preclude agreement on any standard. Hamilton's interest in making taste more inclusive is also clear – as is her moral motivation. Taste is, she says, "seen as connected with the moral principle, and appears, not indeed as an additional faculty bestowed on a few fortunate individuals, but as an operation of the mind, to which all the faculties [ . . . ] and all the affections and sympathies [ . . . ] are alike essential" (*Popular Essays* 1: 184 - 185).<sup>236</sup> Since Hamilton connects taste with morality, she is anxious to imagine that it is something that can be possessed by as many individuals as possible.

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<sup>235</sup> Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2 vols (Edinburgh: Willison for Constable; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817); subsequently Alison.

<sup>236</sup> This corresponds with Hamilton's emphasis upon the general nature of human abilities; in *Letters on Education*, though she suggests nature intended a "sphere" for women, she observes: "To make fine *ladies* and finished *gentlemen* forms no part of my plan, which has for its object the subjection of the passions, the direction of the affections, and the cultivation of the faculties that are common to the whole human race" (3, 10). This emphasis on common abilities given by God owes more to Priestley than to Locke. In the preface to *Exercises in Religious Knowledge*, for example, Hamilton discounts class when considering education in Christianity: "To those who venerate the wisdom of the divine dispensation manifested in the first preaching of the Gospel to the poor, no apology will seem necessary for offering to the consideration of those of higher rank, what was originally composed for the use of young persons brought up in a charitable institution. Whatever be the station, it must be of importance to impress the heart and understanding at an early period, with a sense of individual interest in the scripture doctrines of salvation" (v - vi).

In order to create a more inclusive version of taste Hamilton argues that common environmental influences cultivate it. For example, when discussing the “recollection” which may trigger a taste response, she selects an association, light, which almost everyone must share and which promotes “cheerful” ideas (*Popular Essays* 1: 187). Hamilton also subtly allows for the possibility of education in her model. She suggests that light produces cheerfulness because it is associated with the first consciousness of existence; she recalls the infant’s “delight” in seeing “luminous objects” and so first learning “the art of seeing” (*Popular Essays* 1: 187).<sup>237</sup> By adding this account of childhood, she is moving to a position closer to Hartley’s, which suggests how general environmental influences indirectly educate our taste.<sup>238</sup> Hamilton is suggesting that human experience is similar enough to allow a standard of taste and that taste can be cultivated by exposure to the right influences. In addition, Hamilton’s standard of taste, based on shared environmental influences, would grant women and the less well-educated a greater critical authority than a standard based on classical knowledge or, like Hume’s, on a notion of common human nature which did not always include women.

Hamilton does not, however, elaborate on the possibility of a standard of taste developed from common aspects of sense data. Instead, she suggests that good taste is reliant, not upon an elitist education in and experience of international culture nor upon common aspects of sense data, but upon certain kinds of emotional experience. It is possible to see this by comparing Hamilton’s use of terms connected with the establishment of a standard with someone offering a more mainstream account, in this case, David Hume. Hume’s remarks on taste, though not as offensive to Scottish common sense philosophers as his scepticism, nevertheless came in for some

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<sup>237</sup> A similar point is made by Dugald Stewart in the second essay in part 2; Stewart suggests that the “first ideas of *beauty* formed by the mind are, in all probability, derived from *colours*. Long before infants receive any pleasures from the beauties of form or of motion, (both of which require for their perception, a certain effort of attention and of thought,) their eye may be caught and delighted with brilliant colouring, or with splendid illumination” (*Philosophical Essays* 204; 2. 2. 1. 2).

<sup>238</sup> See David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (1749), introd. Theodore L. Huguelet (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1966), 418 – 42: 1. iv. 1.

criticism. In the latter half of “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume had in particular required in his critic “*practice* in a particular art,” the ability to make “*comparisons* [. . .] examin[ing], and weigh[ing] the several performances, admired in different ages and nations,” and a removal of “prejudice” which requires knowledge of others’ “peculiar views and prejudices,” in fact, a kind of education in aesthetic matters and international art.<sup>239</sup> In contrast, by selecting affective criteria as the correct ones by which to make judgments of taste, Hamilton is rejecting as a basis for the standard a version of experience based on more elitist forms of learning. For example, when explaining that some works have the vitality to survive time while others “cannot, by any art, be prolonged beyond the memory of the circumstances in which it originated,” Hamilton adds that if the critic cannot distinguish this, he is “unqualified” - this implies he would need some experience in order to make such judgments (*Popular Essays* 1: 233). However, Hamilton cites “attention” given to “some emotion [of affection]” as necessary (*Popular Essays* 1: 235). Her critic makes comparisons, not between different artworks, but between objects and the ideas they represent. Objects which produce ideas such as those of “utility [. . .] propriety, fitness” in turn generate emotions of taste in the critic’s mind.<sup>240</sup> The education of Hamilton’s critic, then, is primarily in the emotion-evoking qualities of objects, qualities that stir feeling through a kind of anthropomorphism. Again, this would make the position of arbiter of taste more open to those without a classical education.

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<sup>239</sup>Hume, *Essays* 237–39; several of Hume’s qualifications can theoretically be obtained by anyone, but on closer examination it seems that they are qualities only to be gained by a lengthy education such as that received by the rich. Two other qualifications, “*good sense*” and “*delicacy of imagination*” presumably depend more upon one’s original disposition (*Essays* 234, 240).

<sup>240</sup>*Popular Essays* 1: 231; Alison’s influence is evident here, as he spends considerable time discussing “considerations of Design, of Fitness, and of Utility” which “may be considered as the three great sources of the Relative Beauties of Forms” (*Alison* 2: 57). See also *Alison* 2: 191. In making utility so important to beauty Alison is unusual. A more circuitous approach was taken, for example, by Dugald Stewart, who introduces utility as a necessary condition for beauty quite casually when considering regularity: “The same love of regular forms, and of uniform arrangements, continues to influence powerfully, in the maturity of reason and experience, the judgments we pronounce on all works of human art, where regularity and uniformity do not interfere with purposes of utility” (*Philosophical Essays* 209; part 2, essay 1, 1. 2). His subsequent discussion of “*Sufficient Reason*” also suggests the importance of utility (209–11; 2. 1. 1. 2).

In the same way, her critic would also certainly not decide upon the merits of artwork by applying rules of an Aristotelian type.<sup>241</sup> Hamilton suggests that the critic's judgment will be flawed if his attention "instead of having been directed to the nature of these emotions [of affection], has been exclusively occupied in the study of certain rules of art, and in the productions in which these rules are exemplified."<sup>242</sup> In such a case, "these [rules] will become the only measure of excellence," resulting in a taste within "narrow precincts" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 235). Though Hamilton saw that the classics could be used as a tool to aid the development of her kind of taste, like Wollstonecraft she emphasised the possibility of seeing and judging for oneself.<sup>243</sup>

*A Series of Popular Essays* thus redefines taste as an intelligent attention to human emotions which should be cultivated for the moral good of the community. In the *Essays* Hamilton also provides the model of such an independent critic, a model which has striking gender implications. Hamilton argues that for someone who wishes to develop taste it is less dangerous to admire indiscriminately than to criticise. The criticism she is suspicious of amounts to a "blindness to beauties" which the ignorant, she says, believe "infallible proofs of taste" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 254). Criticism which always seeks to emphasise the worst and never the best, criticism in its more colloquial sense, is what worries Hamilton. Indeed, she is particularly wary of opinion founded on love of self, warning her aesthetic arbiter

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<sup>241</sup>This is of course not to suggest that criticism by a neoclassical structure of rules applied to a given work as a template was anything Hume supported. Indeed, in "Of the Standard of Taste" Hume writes that there "are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease" (233). "General principles" is an expression reminiscent of Hamilton's words on principles rather than rules, suggesting that it is a similar distinction which Hume is making here. In his use of the word "internal," reminiscent of Locke's "internal sense" (reflection) and Hutcheson's more associationist interpretation, Hume does seem to be opening the way for a far more associationist reading.

<sup>242</sup>*Popular Essays* 1: 235; according to Kallich, however, Kames "merely gives psychological justification to the tenets of the neoclassical creed" (199). Hamilton gave her theory of taste more extensive and practical applications.

<sup>243</sup>Her value for them, however, is mainly in the context of how they can aid in developing her kind of good taste. In *Letters on Education* Hamilton writes: "In the course of a classical education, there is method, a regularity, that insensibly produces correspondent habits in the mind [. . .] associations must be formed favourable to [the understanding's] improvement" (195).

not to speak her mind until certain because love of self may thereafter prevent her altering her opinion. She advises that we should “carefully reflect on what passes in our minds” in order to judge whether aesthetic associations are local or universal (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 246).

Hamilton’s initially silent critic who notes merits and does not seek demerits and who purges selfish feelings in order to think of a wider circle of affective emotions, is when taken as a composite both surprisingly feminine and startlingly independent. Her way of coming to a judgment is very different, for example, to that which Hume proposes in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences.” Throughout this essay Hume’s argument is broadly that freedom from external control is necessary to produce works of art (and accurate judges of it). However, an inspection of his examples shows him quickly moving from imagining that mere lack of external control will ensure freedom, into suggesting competition is necessary to maintain it. His second observation is: “That nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states,” partly because it stops authority:

Reputation is often as great a fascination upon men as sovereignty, and is equally destructive to the freedom of thought and examination. But where a number of neighbouring states have a great intercourse of arts and commerce, their mutual jealousy keeps them from receiving too lightly the law from each other, in matters of taste and of reasoning, and makes them examine every work of art with the greatest care and accuracy. The contagion of popular opinion spreads not so easily from one place to another. It readily receives a check in some state or other, where it concurs not with the prevailing prejudices. (*Essays* 120)

In this instance, Hume is suggesting that a national feeling based on pride, a feeling likely to be combative, will lead to the establishment of a detached standard, that from fierce partisanship will come a set of criteria all can agree with. His movement from a freedom which will easily exist given a lack of external tyranny to a freedom

which needs constant strife not just against the state but against the “contagion of popular opinion,” against one’s neighbours, that is, suggests that, for Hume, freedom in the individual is fragile (*Essays* 120). It is in fact so easily broken by others, that only an attitude of hostility and defensiveness can maintain it. In contrast, Hamilton’s critic, settling matters internally and independently before speaking, is not in danger of such erosion.

Hamilton’s critic, then, is independent but has an education in emotion readily available to women, and a lack of competitiveness, indeed even gentleness. Re-examining these and the other qualities of this aesthetic arbiter, it is possible to see their relation to certain models of female behaviour. First, the initial silence of the critic while she considers is reminiscent of the models of silent femininity recommended by conduct writers. In more progressive writings this is not the silence of ignorance and insipidity. Elizabeth Hamilton herself recalls receiving such advice and consequently hiding a copy of Kames under a cushion (Benger 1: 50). In such cases, as with Mary Beaufort in Porter’s *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, feminine silence does not mean stupidity; rather, it represents discretion with regard to learning and imposes a restraint on uttering judgment quickly.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, though the silence of females is initially encouraged to enhance their value on the marriage market, women can use it as a disguise while they develop their judgment. Like such women’s stillness, the wordlessness of Hamilton’s critic conceals not vacancy but self-examination. It is the “careful reflection on what passes in our minds” which in turn produces self-control (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 246). The result is that Hamilton’s critic no longer needs to have material filtered and chosen for him; outside censorship is unnecessary: “The person who has thus in his mind laid the foundation of a just and discriminating taste, will have his judgment improved rather than influenced, by his acquaintance with the writings of professed masters in the school of criticism” (*Popular Essays* 1: 252).

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<sup>244</sup> Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), introd. Jane Porter, *Standard Novels* 4 (London: Colburn and Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Dublin: Cumming, 1831); subsequently



The way in which Hamilton's critic gains power of judgment through silent self-censorship and self-examination is not only similar to a pre-marital model of female behaviour but is also related to the way Hamilton's model mother fits herself to educate (and so have power over) her children. Echoing Wollstonecraft Hamilton writes in *Letters on Education* about motherhood that "the woman who would educate her children with success, must begin by educating herself," must examine "her opinions" and "distinguish judgment and prejudice" (*L. on E.* 11). The mother, like the critic, employs self-censorship in order to take control of her own process of judgment and, ultimately, to assume external authority. For Hamilton, then, to lead opinion publicly or privately, the kind of self-government usually recommended for women is particularly suitable.

At the core of Hamilton's concept of taste is a model of female education. She is, however, applying these paradigms not to women and their education, but to humans and the matter of taste. This is because Hamilton sees the qualities commonly associated with the feminine as essential to human nature as a whole. She suggests that such qualities, instead of being rightly valued as important to the whole race, have been associated with a femininity which has been devalued by misogyny. This misogyny, she argues, stems from the physical inferiority of women in the savage state, which caused a contempt that prevented women from learning in more civilised circumstances. This is a situation which Hamilton links to Ancient Greece and Rome and hence to the classical learning that men, in her account, resorted to when Christianity became involved in schisms and disputes. Such a use of classical rather than Christian values led to serious misjudgment: "By introducing false associations of regard and preference with adventitious circumstances, altogether foreign to the moral character, as learning, strength, valour, power, & c. they [men] have destroyed the just criterion of human worth . . . ." (*L. on E.* 240). The result, Hamilton believed, was not only contempt for femininity but "contempt for those

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*Thaddeus*. See in particular 230, where Mary attends Lady Somerset's gathering and "listened to pious divines of every Christian persuasion."

moral qualities which are allowed to constitute the perfection of the female character. Meekness, gentleness, temperance, and chastity; that command over the passions which is obtained by frequent self-denial” (*L. on E.* 241). Hamilton’s version of the standard of taste seeks to solve the questions raised by the French Revolution debate over authority and self-government by placing these qualities at the centre of human nature.

Hamilton similarly adjusts the gender associations of the sublime and the beautiful to correspond with her belief in an education through human emotion and to emphasise the value she places on “gentleness, temperance, and chastity” (*L. on E.* 241). Hamilton’s treatment of the sublime and the beautiful makes it evident that the framework she works within is a Christian one. She comments:

How sublime is the idea of light to him, who, in the contemplation, of it is impressed with a solemn recollection, that ‘God is light and that in him there is no darkness.’ The emotions produced by this association are sublime. Those produced by a connexion [sic] between the ideas of light and of human virtue may be instanced as emotions of beauty. (*Popular Essays* 1: 188)

Hamilton’s definition can be profitably compared with Burke’s. First, Hamilton removes the gender associations of the sublime and the beautiful. She avoids characterising the sublime as intellectual and therefore masculine; similarly, her definition of the beautiful does not rely upon the affective. She notes that the emotions of the sublime and the beautiful depend upon the “twofold operation” of attention “which serves to unite, or rather blend, two distinct principles of our nature - the affections of the heart, and the faculties of the understanding” (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 190). This rather convoluted sentence allows Hamilton to mention both the understanding and the emotions, as traditionally readers might expect her to do; however, she does not make them correspond with the sublime and the beautiful or the masculine and the feminine as might be anticipated. Rather, both heart and understanding are necessary for “attention” and therefore both are essential

if any emotion of taste is to be experienced. Finally, it should be noted that there is another effect in Hamilton considering the beautiful as an emotion produced by association. In this interpretation the beautiful is not dependent upon such qualities in the object as regularity, smallness and smoothness, as Burke had it, a function of physical qualities. It is removed from such materiality and the limitation it presents. The dialectic of the limited feminine and corporeal beautiful and the masculine, unlimited and intellectual sublime has effectively been removed.

Hamilton's definition, with its substitution of divinity and human morality for the masculine/feminine and strength/weakness dichotomies of Burke's formulation, removes the notion of fear from the sublime. By allying the sublime with divine protection and the beautiful with human morality it posits a more stable and less threatening environment. Hamilton also shows a desire to minimise fear when she explores why a "stupendous mountain" might arouse sublime emotions (*Popular Essays* 1: 202). In opposition to Burke, she notes that it is not someone who connects the works of the "Deity" with "unappeasable wrath and unlimitable puissance" who will feel the sublime (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 203). Rather: "It is in the mind of him to whom all that is vast or magnificent in the fabric of the universe serves to recall the ideas, not only of infinite power and wisdom, but of sublimity" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 203). Such objects as mountains and oceans produce emotions of taste, she adds, because the notions of grandeur and sublimity they evoke come from the parallels they have to "qualities evinced in the actions of intelligent beings" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 204). It is this vision of stability and order (also, as will be seen, present in her account of the sublime in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*) that enables Hamilton to be more concerned with individual improvement than with tyranny and usurpation.

The significance of Hamilton's rejection of "unappeasable wrath and unlimitable puissance" as part of the experience of sublimity can again easily be seen by comparing Hamilton with Burke (*Popular Essays* 1: 203). In *A Philosophical Enquiry* Burke writes when considering ambition:

Now, whatever, either on good or upon bad grounds, tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph, that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived [. . .] than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects. (44 – 45; 1. 17)

This “triumph,” which Burke implies is sublime, seems far from merciful. Indeed, as has been noted in the introduction, even Gerard suggests that sublimity and the idea of the conquering hero seem related.<sup>245</sup> Hamilton, however, minimises the suggestion of dominance in the sublime as her attitude towards ambition and her thoughts on the significance of the conqueror demonstrate. Sending Joanna Baillie her observations on the passions, Hamilton considered the ambition of a:

hero, - that is to say, a pest to society. His delight in the deep play of war and desolation, must arise from the excitements in which the selfish principle is most predominant. The stake for which he throws is the power of identifying with self millions of human beings, and of extending this idea over lands and seas. When the die is cast, and the stake is won, the excitement ceases; and, like other gamblers, he must renew it or be miserable . . . . (Benger 2: 108)

For Hamilton imperialism is not sublime but divine power is. Similarly, weakness is not beautiful but mercy, humility and morality are.

Hamilton’s definitions of the sublime and the beautiful indicate that her answers to the political issues of the 1790s depend on a framework, not of weakness and strength, but of divine beneficence and human morality. In particular, Hamilton wishes to make attention to human emotion more valuable in matters of taste than learning, valour or power. Her feminised critic is a Christian. Hamilton is also resolute that this sense of taste, based on attention to every day experience, can be

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<sup>245</sup>Gerard remarked that “the most imperfect and uncultivated taste is sensible of a sublimity in heroism” and commented shortly before: “We cannot survey a vast army or navy, without being sensible of their grandeur; which arises, not so much from the largeness of the space they occupy, as from the number of men or ships which are in them united under one direction, and co-operate to a common end” (*An Essay on Taste* 15, 14).

taught and through this insistence she promotes a more democratic version of aesthetic experience. The next section will demonstrate how, in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Hamilton envisaged this more universal taste might offer material, spiritual and intellectual improvement to the community.

### iii. A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-Nook? Taste, utility and affection in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*

When Reynolds wrote that “musick is said to have had its origin from a man at leisure listening to the strokes of a hammer” he captured an important truth about taste in general and the eighteenth-century manifestations of taste in particular (*Discourses* 70). It seems that for there to be tasteful people, there must also be those (the majority) without taste. Taste, particularly in terms of the eighteenth century, is thus an aristocratic discourse; that is, not a discourse pertaining solely to the aristocracy but one requiring qualifications not generally available.<sup>246</sup> As has been mentioned, these qualifications (over and above natural endowments) usually included an education which was, to some degree, exclusive, and disinterestedness, about which Cottom has commented: “it is only members of the aristocracy who can afford to look upon the world with this detachment” (11). In spite of Burke’s assertion in his introduction on taste that “So far as Taste is natural, it is nearly common to all,” the search for a standard of taste, then, was as much about explaining why the majority of people made incorrect judgments as it was about defining the standard (Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* 20). Noted by writers such as Bohls, Fabricant and Kramnick, the exclusive nature of taste has long been a critical commonplace.<sup>247</sup> Such commentators indicate that the membership of the groups

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<sup>246</sup> See Cottom 3 for a discussion of the way in which taste is “an aristocratic discourse.”

<sup>247</sup> See for a summary the introduction to Bohls (1 – 22); Carole Fabricant, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century,” in Ralph Cohen, ed. *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 49 – 77), an essay subsequently referred to as Fabricant; and Kramnick 56 – 7, 69, 77; Kramnick notes

who could lay claim to taste were constantly under negotiation but the process they describe seldom includes any one below the middle ranks of society. Nevertheless, for one participant in the “war of ideas” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the case was different. Elizabeth Hamilton’s recognition that the poor could and should make judgements of taste went beyond an assertion that it was, in theory, possible for them to have some of the necessary innate requirements. In *The Cottages of Glenburnie* she was able to picture the consequences of the possession of correct taste for the lower ranks.

Hamilton’s background provides some explanation. Hamilton wrote at a time when, as E. P. Thompson notes, the amount of contact between the gentry and the lower ranks was decreasing.<sup>248</sup> Trends in landscape gardening, particularly as promoted by Capability Brown and Repton, led to signs of rural labour being hidden, while changes in house design increasingly separated the servants from the family.<sup>249</sup> Hamilton, however, to some extent crossed this divide. As her autobiographical writings in Benger’s work explain, Hamilton came from a formerly prestigious family of Jacobites and yet her aunt married a farmer (Benger 1: 18). Hamilton went to live with this aunt when her father died within a year of her birth and hence Hamilton had firsthand knowledge of both the middle and the rural lower ranks. In this, she resembles the spinster heroine of *The Cottagers*, Mrs Mason. Mrs Mason also has experience of different ranks, first as a servant in a wealthy family, later as a visitor with the family of a rector and then with Mrs MacClarty (one of the cottagers) in a highland village.

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that, while rank is particularly important to Shaftesbury for forming a man of taste, a later commentator such as John Gilbert Cooper in his *Letters Concerning Taste* (1755) emphasises taste as a social harmoniser and so retains but does not dwell upon the aristocratic nature of taste (69). See John Gilbert Cooper, *Essays on Taste from Letters Concerning Taste* (1757), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, with *Miscellanies* by John Armstrong, introd. Ralph Cohen, Augustan Reprint Society Publications 30 (Los Angeles, CA: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1951).

<sup>248</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1963), see for example, 11.

<sup>249</sup>See Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins, “Picturesque Landscaping and Estate Management: Uvedale Price and Nathaniel Kent at Foxley,” in Copley and Garside 13 – 41. For a discussion of trends in gardening see also Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971).

In addition, the location of Hamilton's tale in rural Scotland is significant. A particular emphasis had been placed on the civilisation of rural Scotland through education, the improvement of levels of literacy and the use of orality of a responsible kind (not that of the gossip).<sup>250</sup> Hamilton herself was keen to emphasise the superior degree of civilisation in Scotland, as her remarks on poetry in *A Series of Popular Essays* show. She writes that in "the songs, or ballads, or other species of poetical composition, which are known to have been popular at any particular period, or in any particular country" we can judge the degree of faculties cultivated; for example, the poetry of "savages" abounds, she argues, with "images of cruelty" while it is "in the description of natural objects so defective, as to evince, that the perceptions were in so uncultivated a state as to be only partially exercised" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 160 - 61). Hamilton next rejects oriental poetry for its lack of judgment and passion (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 161 - 2). In contrast, presumably thinking of Ossian, she claims that Gaelic poetry shows that all that "interests the affections had been objects of attention" (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 164).

In her emphasis on education Hamilton was also following a trend in Scottish society. As Penny Fielding notes: "Those Scots who sought to benefit from the social and financial opportunities of Hanoverian Britain were anxious to shake off the stigma of what was commonly seen as a pre-Union feudal past," so that by the second half of the eighteenth century Scotland with "its distinctive parish school system and great ancient universities, was consolidating a view of the greater availability of Scottish education over its English counterpart which was to last throughout the nineteenth century and beyond" (Fielding 8). Backed by a cultural willingness to enhance and promote the civilisation of the Scottish countryside, Hamilton was able to extend the status of aesthetic subjects to the labouring people, at least in fiction. With its reassuring rural location, *The Cottagers* combines a

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<sup>250</sup>See, for example, Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, in particular, her account of how Hugh Blair's emphasis on rhetoric takes an unexpected turn: "Yet rather than identifying this

fiction of responsible orality with print circulation. The subtitle of Hamilton's novel "*A Tale for a Farmer's Ingle-Nook*" may be seen as an attempt to reclaim a less reputable form of orality and to connect the highland farmers with the rest of Scotland. Indeed, *The Cottagers* is quite explicitly about social connection, as the episode of Mrs Mason's arrival in the glen demonstrates. An unmended track slows her entrance but Mr Stewart points out how much less effort it would take to repair the road (128 - 29). The episode suggests Hamilton's interest in building cultural bridges and it also hints at Hamilton's belief that the lower ranks needed taste.

In fact, there were two unusual aspects to Hamilton's treatment of class and taste in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*. First, the intimacy of its portrayal of the lower ranking rural population was singular. The novel was insistent that they develop and employ taste for their own benefit. An examination of Carole Fabricant's comments in "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century" on one of Hamilton's acquaintance, Hester Lynch Piozzi, demonstrates this. In her article, she uses Piozzi to emphasise the distance between the picturesque traveller and the poor. When Piozzi travels through Lyons the dwellings of the poor are presented in opposition to the experience of the landscape where there is "ceaseless variety of colouring among the plants" which seem "scattered by the open hand of lavish Nature" over "a landscape of respectable extent."<sup>251</sup> Fabricant notes how Piozzi "interrupted her exuberant testimonial in order to note with disgust: 'Every town that should adorn these lovely plains, however, exhibits, upon a nearer approach, misery'" (Fabricant 62). She comments that Piozzi sees the "unmistakable signs of poverty" "not as social and economic ills but as intolerable eyesores" (62). Piozzi's rhetoric can in fact be interpreted differently. Her use of economic and social language in describing the landscape (nature is "lavish" and "respectable") highlights the difference between the potential and the reality. The poor live in a

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freedom in a lost Eden of speech, he happily relocates it in the commercial values of eighteenth-century Britain" (12).

<sup>251</sup>Fabricant 62; Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, ed. Herbert Barrows (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1967), 15.



landscape which offers encouragement to middle and upper class largess but they do not experience any benefits from it.

Piozzi's townspeople are, however, only seen at a distance and the language of generosity which her landscape description uses suggests that the alleviation of their sufferings will come from outside. Hamilton, in contrast and unusually, describes the lives of her cottagers down to the hairs in their butter (*Cottagers* 147 – 48). She also insists that their own actions can bring them into greater aesthetic harmony with their environment and thus lead to their social and moral improvement. She still, it is true, sometimes shows a reluctance about portraying the poor as capable of full experiences of taste. However, Mrs Mason, a former servant, is shown to experience both the sublime and the beautiful, assuming the position of aesthetic subject. Additionally, the villagers who receive an education at the new school in Glenburnie produce beauty, even though they are not seen judging it. For example, after the school is founded, Mrs Mason records "improvements" in Glenburnie, while, when the Earl of Longlands arrived, "the village presented such a picture of neatness and comfort, as excelled all that in the course of their travels they had seen," with carts "placed in wattled sheds attached to the gable end of the dwelling, and which were rendered ornamental from their coverings of honey-suckle or ivy" and the "bright and clear glass of the windows" which "was seen to advantage peering through the foliage of the rose-trees" (*Cottagers* 397 - 98). In this description the aesthetic subject is of course the Earl rather than the cottagers, and his right to be an aesthetic judge is furthermore suggested by the allusion to his "travels" (*Cottagers* 397). Hamilton momentarily reverts to a model in which taste is guaranteed by a certain kind of experience, part of which is an education specifically in aesthetic matters. Nevertheless, Hamilton is suggesting that the cottagers can create beauty not merely as a coincidental by-product of their daily labour, but, as "ornamental" suggests, as an intentional act.

Her villagers are rather more independent in their taste than those of another Scottish writer, Susan Ferrier. In her novel *Marriage* (1818), for example, Ferrier's

wise but only moderately well-off landowners enter into a small-scale work creation scheme in order to brighten up their pleasure grounds, employing the local children.<sup>252</sup> Before their work, Mrs Douglas comments, “the place was a perfect wilderness” and “the village presented a still more melancholy scene of rank luxuriance, in its swarms of dirty idle girls, and mischievous boys” (Ferrier 97). Employing the children for “trifling rewards,” the Douglasses improve “the moral as well as the vegetable part of creation” (Ferrier 97). This deployment of labour is directed from further up the social scale than in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*. Ferrier’s children are more isolated from the rest of their community and less self-governing in their taste than Hamilton’s.<sup>253</sup> It can therefore be seen that while Hamilton’s notion of taste in practice owes something to the class prejudice of earlier formulations, she nevertheless indicates that education improves the taste (as well as the efficiency and morality) of even humble communities.

Secondly, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* is unusual because its edicts, addressed ostensibly to the labouring ranks, are actually for the benefit of the middle classes as well. Hamilton’s subtitle “A Tale for the Farmer’s Ingle-Nook” indicates that her aim is in part to educate the lower ranks as More had done in her *Cheap Repository Tracts*.<sup>254</sup> Tellingly, the readership of *The Cottagers* was by no means only from the lower orders. Bengier suggests that “I canna be fashed” became a fashionable phrase, indicating that a readership of higher status existed for *The Cottagers* (Bengier 1: 170). In fact, Hamilton offers instruction to the middle ranks as well as to the lower on the matter of taste and morality. The primary instructor in

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<sup>252</sup>Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (1818), ed. Herbert Foltinek (Oxford: World’s Classics-Oxford UP, 1986); subsequently Ferrier.

<sup>253</sup>Both Ferrier’s and Hamilton’s children form a striking contrast to the extremely poor children aestheticized by Gainsborough and to the poor of Constable; see John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730 – 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), where Barrell agrees that Gainsborough “naturalises the extreme poverty of the poor – he presents it as a fixture in a changeless world which is the best of all possible worlds,” and also notes how Constable found it was “necessary for him to reduce his figures until they merge insignificantly with the landscape, to distance them, and even when they are in the foreground to paint them as indistinctly as possible, to evade the question of their actuality” (85, 134). Hamilton’s cottagers are not indistinct, but vital to her work.

the work is, after all, Mrs Mason, a former servant, rather than Mr Stewart, who, given his name and his position of rector, might seem to embody a traditional source of middle class authority. The advising presence of Mrs Mason destabilises any notion of a paternal relationship between the middle and lower classes.

The first problem which Mrs Mason encounters occurs while she stays with the Stewarts. Miss Stewart, who aspires to gentility, describes the importance of young ladies being fashionable: "I don't mean those who have fortunes, for there is nothing in that; but those who have not a shilling to depend on. Yet they are all so fine . . . ." (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 18). Miss Stewart herself, though attempting to be fashionable, does not look after her clothes. The lower class is affected by a similar dynamic, though for its members the alternatives are not only honesty or debt but neatness and squalor. In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* Hamilton suggests how the school, formed along the correct educational principles, changes the dress of its female pupils; they are perpetually neat instead of subscribing to extremes of week day grime and Sunday best. Both lower and upper ranks experience the same temptations and have the same lessons to learn about the taste/fashion dichotomy.

In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* Hamilton is in fact proposing a way of making aesthetic judgements that pertains equally to the less and the more well-off. This doubling of purpose was not unusual for educational books aimed at the children's market in the period. This was partly due to the relatively embryonic state of the children's book industry and partly because of an interest in educational theory which meant that parents were supposed to be re-instructed alongside their children. The wish to instruct parents can be seen in the influential *Adelaide and Theodore*, for example, in the opening sequence of letters. The Baroness d'Almanc writes to the Viscountess d' Limours both about how the latter should bring up her own daughter and how she should educate herself. Priscilla Wakefield's educational works, such as, for example, *Mental Improvement: Or the Beauties and Wonders of*

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<sup>254</sup>For a selection see Hannah More, "Stories and Tales," *The Works of Hannah More. A New Edition, with Additions and Corrections*, vol. 3 (London: Cadell, 1830), 11 vols.

*Nature and Art, Conveyed in a Series of Instructive Conversations* (1794), at once impart information and portray a family learning situation which demonstrates to the adults how to convey knowledge to their children.<sup>255</sup> However, Hamilton's *Cottagers* employs this tactic on the level of class rather than on the level of family. Further, instead of telling the middle ranks how to improve the poor, *The Cottagers* shows the labouring and the middle classes their responsibility to educate themselves.

How is Hamilton able to propose a version of taste for such a wide section of society? It is because her theory of taste is in several ways rather different to the mainstream of eighteenth century aesthetic theory. In particular, it is because of Hamilton's use of associationist psychology that she can imagine that employing taste produces harmony right down the social scale. The first important aspect of Hamilton's thought concerns her use of the notion of utility. Like Alison (though unlike most other aestheticians of the period) Hamilton links "ideas of utility, or of propriety, fitness, symmetry, and congruity" with taste in the *Popular Essays* (1: 232). In practice, as *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* had been used by Hamilton to illustrate, this means that items are not given taste value merely because they are associated with the upper ranks. Thus taste will not degenerate into fashion but will be self-legislating.

Secondly, Hamilton suggests the importance of human connections, of, in fact, affection in the development of taste; in the *Essays* she writes that to possess taste one's attention must combine "affections of the heart and the understanding" and must be directed towards qualities in external objects which are likely to excite "the same affections as are inspired by the proper objects of his love, pity, admiration, & c." (*Popular Essays* 1: 191, 190). Further, natural objects are beautiful because they remind the spectator of noble qualities which humans possess. Hamilton's anthropomorphising taste in fact provides a further insurance

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<sup>255</sup>Priscilla Wakefield, *Mental Improvement: Or the Beauties and Wonders of Nature and Art, Conveyed in a Series of Instructive Conversations*. London: Darton, 1794.

against the excesses of fashion. Since taste so defined would fill the observer with “the same affections as are inspired by the proper objects of his love,” he would have an enhanced moral sense towards his family and would not wish to possess objects that are not genuinely useful to them. *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* suggests a similar nexus of a sense of fitness, taste and affection and indicates that an improvement in taste leads to a better community as well as vice versa.

This is initially illustrated by the foolishness of Miss Stewart as opposed to the more moral and practical values of her father. Miss Stewart finds she has married not the gentleman she thought, but the extremely fashionable son of a shoemaker and is extremely concerned with her apparent loss of status. Mr Stewart, on the other hand, is willing to accept his son-in-law: “ ‘They are in every respect upon a footing,’ cried Mr Stewart. ‘If his father is an honest tradesman, what is her father but an honest farmer’ ” (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 339). Mr. Stewart’s words are a precursor to Elizabeth Bennet’s in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) – “He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen, *Novels* 2: 356). However, while Elizabeth is essentially asserting a right to upward social mobility through a concept of gentleman as a behavioural mode, Mr Stewart is suggesting the insignificance of his daughter’s apparently downward social move. He can do this because his standard is morality - “honest[y]”. For Hamilton it is quite clear that nothing can be tasteful (or, to put it another way, gentlemanly) which is not moral.

Morality (in particular, attention to others), utility and taste are also connected when Hamilton considers the lower ranks. During the first half of Mrs Mason’s stay in Glenburnie, she lodges with Mrs MacClarty, whose name means “dirty.” As might be expected, Mrs MacClarty’s house is unattractive and disregarded, and in this reflects the attitudes of its occupants who are neglectful in their attitudes to each other. For example, the youngest child is not only reluctant to offer help in household, but also throws mud at their windows after Mrs Mason has cleaned them (174 – 80). It seems that a lack of aesthetic awareness accompanies an absence of consideration. Hamilton has a further point, however. Making tea at Mrs

MacClarty's house it is necessary to find a towel for washing. The hostess "stepped to a huge Dutch press, and having, with some difficulty, opened the leaves, took from a store of nice linen, which it presented to their view, a fine damask napkin," too fine in fact for use in that situation, as Mrs Mason points out (*Cottagers* 145). Mrs MacClarty presumably thinks this linen improves her status, but it does nothing to make her life easier, more comfortable or more enjoyable. The tea drinkers have to use a dirty towel, both aesthetically displeasing and unhygienic, to wipe their cups. Here Hamilton is suggesting that it is foolish to think good taste means owning objects which apparently possess status but are neither useful nor ornamental - the fact that the dresser holding the napkins only opened "with some difficulty" underlines their uselessness for the astute reader.

Hamilton suggests that those who have good taste chose objects for their fitness rather than their status, and display them if they have ornamental value. This is emphasised in the second half of Mrs Mason's stay in Glenburnie, where a number of parallels are set up with her unsuccessful attempts at teaching earlier in the novel. Mason goes to stay with Mr Morison and his wife. Mr Morison has lost his money in trade - he imagined he was aiming at a rise in status, but in fact went into debt and suffered for it. He is shown by Mrs Mason how to improve his situation along the lines of genuine comfort and fitness instead of imagining that improvement must come through the possession of the kind of high status articles for which he would have to go into debt. Once Mr Morison becomes convinced of these values, he disseminates them as schoolteacher and the result is an improvement in comfort and beauty for the whole village. In this latter part of the novel the clear glass of the windows peeping through the roses, presumably the result of the school children's labours, contrasts with the mud thrown by Mrs MacClarty's child earlier in the novel (180). Earlier, the child's actions had suggested how a lack of affection or care for the convenience for others is coupled with misplaced ideas about taste and status. This reverse case therefore implies that responsible affection accompanies the taste which has transformed the village.

Hamilton's attitude to beauty and utility as well as her use of the symbol of the glass window are also significant in terms of de Bolla's comments on the sublime. In his work *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* de Bolla compares Coleridge's remarks on gothic cathedrals with Addison's, in order to "identify the difference between the discourse on the sublime and its wariness in the face of its own excess, and the discourse of the sublime with its corresponding ease and pursuit of it" (45). He suggests: "For Addison the mind may be opened 'to vast conceptions', it may be imprinted by external objects. This is a feature of the discourse on the sublime which presumes an unproblematic one-to-one translatability between qualities of objects in the world and internal sensations" (de Bolla 45). Hamilton, with a more associationist leaning than Addison, is also interested in a one-to-one translatability. She wishes objects to be seen in terms of their utility and she assumes that their value in this respect is easily quantifiable. Through an education encouraging the correct associations, objects in the external world may be given an internal value which actually corresponds to an external situation. The symbol of the cleaned window suggests improved vision, an improved vision that allows external objects assume a congruent, undistorted value in the mind. The dirty window, on the other hand, corresponds to a situation in which external objects are incorrectly valued (180). Certain objects are accredited with a worth in excess of their utility, generated by the discourse of fashion. Meanwhile, the cleanliness of other objects are neglected because the ongoing effort of maintenance is perceived too great. The combined result is a lack of hygiene, taste and consideration.

Fashion and debt are linked in Hamilton's work because to subscribe to fashion is to give an object a worth above its use value. In linking fashionable taste and debt, she is hardly alone. The two are connected in the work of many novelists of the period, including Ferrier, Brunton and Edgeworth.<sup>256</sup> However, de Bolla's

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<sup>256</sup>For example, in Brunton's *Discipline* Ellen Percy's distorted fashionable values in early life may be seen when she bids for "a tortoiseshell dressing-box, magnificently inlaid with

work allows their observations not to be seen as a mere moralistic move or even as a record of fashionable life but as a response to a trend in taste. As has been seen, de Bolla considers the excess generated by the sublime which a discourse on it seeks to contain and a discourse of it celebrates. He also examines how the “legislative discourse of the sublime,” is “placed next to concurrent set of enquiries about the national debt during the course of the Seven Years War” (de Bolla 21). In the work of Hamilton, Edgeworth, Burney, and Brunton, amongst others, the connection between fashion, excess and debt is explicit. This perhaps accounts for Hamilton’s need to distinguish taste from its more pernicious cousin, fashion. Certainly, Hamilton’s insistence on the importance of utility and affection brings her into conflict with several important trends in the aesthetic thought of the period. Her fear of excess and desire for utility leads her to moderate the sublime. Furthermore, her insistence on the connection between utility, taste and affection leads her to suspicion of the picturesque.

Examining Hamilton’s treatment of the sublime first, then, it is possible to see that she wishes to minimise the amount of excess it produces. This can be seen in Hamilton’s discussion of the sublime in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*. There is only one clear instance of the sublime in *The Cottagers*, coinciding with Hamilton’s feeling that it was less common for individuals to possess the right associations. The instance occurs on the morning after Mrs Mason’s arrival in the glen. Leaving the cottage, Mrs Mason sees a waterfall and sitting on a rock she is “arrested by admiration at the many beauties of the scene” (*Cottagers* 193). She sees “the effulgent glory of the heavens, as they brightened into splendour at the approach of the lord of the day,” a sentence which contains the notion of greatness required by

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gold. Art had exhausted it self in the elegance of the pattern and the delicacy of the workmanship. It was every way calculated to arrest the regards of fine ladies; for, like them, it was useless and expensive in proportion to its finery” (75). Fashionable competition causes Ellen to bid far more than this “useless” object is worth, and in borrowing the money to pay for it, she compromises her reputation. The auction she attends is a literal example of fashion generating threatening excess. Returning to the example of landscape garden in *Marriage* it may be remembered how Mrs Douglas firmly separates taste and excess: “ ‘Such an establishment would ill accord with our moderate means,’ replied she; ‘ we do not pretend to a regular gardener’ ” (97).



the sublime though tempered by the early mention of “beauties” (*Cottagers* 193). Similarly, Hamilton’s “lord,” the day, is both necessary and beneficent rather than merely powerful (*Cottagers* 193). Rapture is generated but it is quite specifically an emotion possessing utility rather than one which is disproportionate to its object and out of the control of its possessor:

The good woman’s heart glowed with rapture: but it did not vainly  
glow, as does the heart, or the imagination of many a pretender to  
superior taste; for the rapture of her heart was fraught with gratitude.  
She saw the God of nature in his works, and blessed the goodness  
which, even in the hour of creation, ordained, that they should not only  
contribute to the use, but add to the enjoyments of the human race.

(Hamilton, *Cottagers* 193 - 94)<sup>257</sup>

Mrs Mason is linking appreciation of scenery with a goodness reminiscent of “benevolence and mercy” rather than of connoisseurship.

Hamilton also gives this version of the sublime some interesting class implications. Her seat on a rock, as opposed to a cunningly placed bench, and her view of a natural rather than a landscaped scene both assert the value of the natural (and in this view, the godly) over the aesthetic enjoyment available to the privileged. For her, the very ability to experience the sublime is closely linked to the realisation that (common) nature is superior to (elitist) art. First, she recognises that God has given man the gift of enjoyment in the material world: “ ‘The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing;’ and he who implanted these desires, has he not mercifully provided for their gratification?” (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 194). Having

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<sup>257</sup> See also William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; And on Sketching Landscape: To Which is Added a Poem, on Landscape Painting* (1792), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Blamire, 1794; Farnborough, Eng.: Gregg, 1972); subsequently referred to as Gilpin. Hamilton’s comments also relate interestingly to Gilpin’s remarks on picturesque and other varieties of beauty; Hamilton not only spends significant time on “scenes, that are beautiful, amusing, or other wise pleasing [ . . . ] the cottage – the improved garden-scene” - she also, when describing a potentially picturesque scene, ascribes to it the kind of pleasure Gilpin links with non-picturesque beauty (ii). Confronted with “works of tillage”, “we reverence, and admire the works of God; and look with benevolence, and pleasure, on the works of men” (ii).

placed aesthetic matters in this divine context, Mrs Mason suggests that artworks designed by men for the glory of the rich and powerful are insignificant:

What are all the works of man, what all the pomp and splendour of monarchs, compared with the grandeur of such a scene? But the sights that are designed by man, as proofs of his creative skill, are only to be seen by the rich and great; while the glorious works of God are exhibited to all. Pursuing this thought a little farther, it occurred to Mrs Mason, that all that is rare, is in general useless; and that all that is most truly valuable is given in common, and placed within the reach of the poor and lowly. (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 194)

In one way, of course, this resembles the type of conservative religious argument which encourages the poor to be contented with their lot, by denying that the rich are really any better off.<sup>258</sup> However, in connecting the argument with issues of taste, Hamilton has made it difficult to read in this way. The upper classes and socially aspirant traditionally lay claim to good taste, because they see the “sights that are designed by man” - they have an education in aesthetic experience. To claim this status they must be able to say they can feel the sublime. However, according to Mrs Mason, in the very act of feeling the sublime they will deny the importance of an elitist education.

Hamilton’s connection of affection, utility and taste also had an effect on her relation to the picturesque. In Gilpin’s *Three Essays; on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque travel; and on Sketching* he made his notorious suggestion that the scene being sketched should be altered, with objects added from other scenes if

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<sup>258</sup>In *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* there is an incident that comes even closer to doing this. It is this support for authority through Christianity that Claudia L. Johnson comments on in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*: “While discussing masculine abuses of domestic power, Dr Orwell, normative center of *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, emphatically claims, ‘it is impossible that a real Christian should ever be a tyrant . . . .’” (9). Johnson then emphasises that Hamilton’s solution lies with individuals: “In this manner, abuses which reformers would argue are distinct to existing power structures themselves are dismissed as adventitious, as genuine but purely personal failures on the part of individuals. Although far less doctrinaire than West, Elizabeth Hamilton shares her unwillingness to examine, as Austen does in *Mansfield Park*, for example, when authority itself can be

necessary, to enhance the effect (56 – 7). In contrast, Hamilton had remarked that objects please by representing a quality of the mind, as suggested in her discussion of the relative beauties of the birch and the aspen.<sup>259</sup> This variety of pleasure relying on resemblance would be lessened by mixture in the character of the object. Indeed, in the light of Ann Bermingham's work on "The Picturesque and Ready-to-Wear Femininity," Hamilton's suspicion of fashion can be traced to a dislike of the mixed forms so common in the picturesque. The form of imagination that Hamilton associates with the predilection to fashion, for example, is full of "incongruous assemblages" and so unlikely to produce in their full strength the associations with human nature which Hamilton finds so significant. Further, when discussing the sublimity of the mountain scene in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Hamilton's narrator does not think of transforming nature into art; rather, she suggests the superiority of nature to art; art's very exclusivity proves it is less valuable. In contrast, one main strand in Gilpin's definition of the picturesque (a definition which often shifts alarmingly) is that it is particularly suited for painting; he says in reply to Reynolds at the end of the first essay: "With regard to the term picturesque, I have always myself used it merely to denote such objects, as are proper subjects for painting" (Gilpin 37). This type of aesthetic pleasure could have little interest for Hamilton.

Gilpin's second essay on picturesque travel would also present difficulties for Hamilton, largely because of its moral implications. For Gilpin, picturesque travel ignores the "difficulty of *assigning causes*," and is a "*searching after effects*" (Gilpin 41). According to this definition, the picturesque ignores the knowledge of

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morally problematic" (9). Johnson's picture should be revised in the light of Hamilton's comments on rank in *Agrippina*.

<sup>259</sup> Alison had also explained how inanimate matter could be beautiful through resemblance, remarking: "Not only the smell of the Rose, or the Violet, is expressed to us by their Colours and Forms; but the utility of a Machine, the elegance of a Design, the proportion of a Column, the Speed of the Horse, the ferocity of the Lion, even all the qualities of the human mind, are naturally expressed to us by certain visible appearances; because our experience has taught us, that such qualities are connected with such appearances; and the presence of the one immediately suggests to us the idea of the other. Such visible qualities, therefore, are gradually considered as the Signs of other qualities, and are productive to us of the same Emotions with the qualities they signify" (1: 291 – 92).

the human mind which for Hamilton makes taste a moral faculty. Picturesque travel, like fashion, involves the pleasure of the “pursuit of his object - the expectation of new scenes continually opening, and arising to his view” (Gilpin 47). In other words, it involves pleasure in change for its own sake, as does fashion. Finally, it is useful to remember that the lord who travels in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* returns to judge the beauty of a village, but has been away during the site’s actual improvement. Picturesque travel leads to the neglect of responsibilities, to absenteeism. Hamilton leaves this criticism implicit in her plot. She is never as explicit as Edgeworth in *The Absentee* (1812), for example, but the two novels have an interesting point of similarity.<sup>260</sup> In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* it is the ceaseless change of picturesque travel that is partly responsible for the landowner’s neglect, while in *The Absentee* Lady Clonbrony’s reason for wishing to remain in England is her love of fashion. As Bermingham notes, fashion and the picturesque are similar in form.

Hamilton is at pains to suggest that associations with power should not give objects aesthetic value. Instead, she suggests that an object’s fitness determines how tasteful it is; if it provides genuine comfort and encourages affection, it is tasteful. In contrast, when excessive value is granted to objects because of fashion, the result is debt, disaster and estrangement. People who have been unaccustomed to apply their “attention” fall into this trap. Whether rich or poor, if they perform no acts of concentration, no work, they become a threat. Their imaginations form the wrong associations, leading to the excesses of fashion and to the neglectful dilettantism which Hamilton links to the picturesque. For her, fashionable excess and the vacuity it causes are dangerous to the nation.

### iii. Fashion, Imagination and Defending the Nation

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<sup>260</sup>Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and The Absentee* (1800, 1812) (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994).

In her article “War Correspondence: Maria Edgeworth and the En-gendering of Revolution, Rebellion, and Union,” Mitzi Myers asks whether “women do politics” and suggests that one of the important ways in which they might is through fashion. Restless and mobile, fashion is “an ideal vehicle for philosophically emblemizing the innovative and the outmoded. Both contemporary and twentieth-century commentators on French Revolutionary garb note that the period’s styles demonstrate ‘incredible caprice’ and cross-channel circulation.”<sup>261</sup> Such caprice, however, was just as likely to spark a correspondent fearfulness of fashion, born of a suspicion that it was dangerous to the community and hence politically suspect. Indeed, while attacks on fashion had been commonplace throughout the eighteenth century, they gained a particular resonance during the 1790s. In particular, writers attacked country house society or the upper ranks for their excessive consumerism and interest in fashion. This lack of self-control was often also linked with novel reading or the romance. For more conservative writers, such weakness invited radicalism and sexual ruin. For those in favour of reform, addiction to fashion was a sign of moral corruption in the state. As Wollstonecraft put it:

Women are, in common with men, rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright. (*Political Writings* 226)

For her, following fashion does not just connote mental laxity in the individual; it is also a sign of slavery connected with fundamental problems in the distribution of power.

In fact, as Wollstonecraft’s remarks suggest, not only the changes of fashion, but also the notion of fashion and its relation to individual and social health were an important part of the debate prompted by the French Revolution. Fashion was

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<sup>261</sup>Mitzi Myers, “War Correspondence: Maria Edgeworth and the En-gendering of Revolution, Rebellion, and Union,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22 (1998): 74 – 91, quotations

perceived as a pervasive social phenomenon likely to effect the well-being of the nation. This section will show how, while for Wollstonecraft fashion and subordination were linked, less radical writers concentrated upon the effects of fashion on the mind of the individual. While rewriting Wollstonecraft's account of fashion, authors were led to consider the psychology of the individual and the potential for a mental discipline that would counteract the effects of fashion. In particular, Elizabeth Hamilton rewrote Wollstonecraft's portrayal of fashion and was hence led to an examination of the imagination.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had associated fashion with the soldiers of a standing army, who, because of their subordination, suffered from mental weakness and hence were lured into the kind of fashionable behaviour which Wollstonecraft saw as detrimental to the rest of the country:

nothing can be so prejudicial to the morals of the inhabitants of country towns as the occasional residence of a set of idle superficial young men [ . . . ] An air of fashion, which is but a badge of slavery, and proves that the soul has not a strong individual character, awes simple country people into an imitation of the vices, when they cannot catch the slippery graces, of politeness. (Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings* 81)

For Wollstonecraft, it is not the perspective or desires of the individual which are dangerous but those of the mass. Fashion is a sign of the submersion of personal desire in those of the group and, importantly, it is to be found where subordination or "slavery" is the rule. Adherence to fashion, mental laxity and the presence of the army are hence fundamentally connected and all are detrimental to the morality of the nation. In addition, Wollstonecraft suggests that not only the army but the clergy are particularly susceptible to the mental dangers of subordination (*Political Writings* 81 - 82).

Her account of the relation between fashion, the army and the clergy is, however, rewritten by Elizabeth Hamilton in the *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*

and *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*. Indeed, in the *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* Hamilton's two main plots form a dual response to Wollstonecraft's criticism of soldiers and churchmen. The comic plot of Bridgetina Botherim, a clergyman's daughter, details the dangers she runs as a result of her knowledge of metaphysics and honour. Clergymen are a perennial favourite as the fathers of heroines in novels, but since this novel in particular forms a commentary on the works of Jacobin philosophers, it can be viewed in the context of Wollstonecraft's comments. The tragic plot has Julia Delmond, the daughter of a soldier, seduced by a revolutionary metaphysician and dying in childbirth. However, both plots emphasise individual responsibility rather than indicating, as Wollstonecraft might, that subordination caused moral decline in either the soldier or the clergyman. When Hamilton briefly mentions Bridgetina's clergyman father it is only to note that he was an unthinking gourmand rather than to mention his superiors. Similarly, when discussing Captain Delmond it is the effects of idleness rather than those of slavery which concern her. When the Captain, separated from other officers in the standing army, begins to read, Hamilton remarks it is an entertainment "little inferior to that which is derived from any of the methods usually employed by the modern sons of Mars to murder that worst of enemies, Time. If it lost in comparison with the lounge at the milliner's shop, it was, at least, fully as amusing as *looking over the bridge*" (*Memoirs* 121). It is not the "tyranny" of rank that Hamilton suggests produces weakness, but a mental vacuity produced by the occupations that are fashionable among soldiers.

Hamilton's emphasis on individual rather than institutional responsibility also leads to a difference of perspective from Wollstonecraft on the "fashion" of romantic honour. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had argued that in a standing army:

A spirit inspired by romantic notions of honour, a kind of morality founded on the fashion of the age, can only be felt by a few officers, whilst the main body must be moved by command, like the waves of the sea; for the strong wind of authority pushes the crowd of subalterns

forward, they scarcely know or care why, with headlong fury. (*Political Writings* 81)

In connecting the mental indolence of fashion with a romance empty of Christianity, Wollstonecraft is echoing her earlier criticisms of Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. For her, fashion, romance and chivalry are linked to Burke's variety of conservatism and irrational subordination.

Hamilton, on the other hand, is determined to place the responsibility for such mental laxity and impressionability upon individuals and, in particular, upon the writers of romance and the sceptical philosophy with which the radicals were associated. In *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, when Captain Delmond discovers reading, his books are unfortunately romances and philosophical works. The former lead him to a quixotic piece of gallantry when he runs off with his friend's fiancée. The latter places the Captain "in complete possession of all that ever has, and probably all that ever will be, said against the Christian faith" (Hamilton, *Memoirs* 126). As a result, he educates his daughter with refined notions of honour but with no notion of religion and no guiding female influence. This, according to Hamilton, deprives Julia of a firm basis for her principles and so leads to her eventual destruction. Similarly, Bridgetina Botherim is made almost delusional by atheistic "metaphysicks" and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. For Hamilton, as for Reid, scepticism and atheism lead to immorality and romance reading confirms this by cultivating insipid sentimentality. Additionally, the emphasis Hamilton places on the promulgation of such principles via works of philosophy and novels parallels the emphasis placed on the responsibility of the author by Reid and Beattie; Beattie, for example, remarks of the *Treatise of Human Nature* that "as a system of licentious doctrine it had been but *too successful*; and that to the author's reputation as a philosopher, and to his influence as promoter of infidelity, it had contributed not a little."<sup>262</sup> Beattie connects scepticism, immorality and the spread of such thought as Hamilton does



and he is quite explicit about the responsibility of the author. He also shares an emphasis on Christianity as a source of philosophy with Hamilton.

It can therefore be seen that, far from associating fashion and mental indolence with subordination and conservatism, Hamilton links it with radicalism and sceptical philosophy. In addition, Hamilton emphasises local accountability rather than the institutional responsibility which Wollstonecraft indicates. This is reflected by the importance of the father and daughter relationship in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* rather than that of husband and wife. In this Hamilton differs from Wollstonecraft. After Wollstonecraft had given her descriptions of the subordination and subsequent immorality of soldier and clergyman, she suggested a parallel with the situation of women subjugated by their husbands – and the institutionalised encouragement of such abuses were highlighted by her in *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman*. Hamilton, on the other hand, shows how Julia's father, Captain Delmond, transferred his errors to her. Misguided education, she suggests, is an inheritance damaging to the fabric of society.

While discussing fashion and the incorrect associations which accompany it Hamilton is able to describe the debasement of individuals who struggle for social prestige. She thus avoids attacking institutions directly in the manner of Wollstonecraft. However, there is one exception. In *Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina* Hamilton shows a much greater willingness to discuss the effects on the state of those institutions which encourage unthinking subordination. Fashion is still a source of corruption, but Hamilton also comments: "The further we extend our observations upon the distinguishing peculiarities which form the characteristic features of national character, the more fully shall we be convinced of the extraordinary influence of political institution" (*Agrippina* 1: 4). She considers the effect of slavery on the state in Ancient Rome and the chronological distance enables her to consider the larger social organisation of the state (*Agrippina* 1: 1 –

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<sup>262</sup>See James Beattie, *Philosophical and Critical Works*, in particular, from the 1776 *Essays*, "On the Nature and Immutability of TRUTH, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism,"

61). In addition, by critiquing of the values of pagan Rome, Hamilton, like Reeve with her doubts of the morality of epic, was promoting a more Christian and feminised social vision. Therefore, *Agrippina* is consistent with her larger project. However, the potential perils of holding such opinions are suggested by comments of the critic for the *Monthly Reviewer* who remarked: "The first chapter contains an highly able and eloquent dissertation on the history and character of the ancient Romans. We suspect, however, that she has rather overrated the influence of forms of government on national manners. The latter perhaps will be oftener found to have given rise to the former, tho' there is no doubt a powerful reaction."<sup>263</sup> Perhaps for that reason Hamilton generally seems wary of discussing the issue of subordination in the context of institutions. Thus when she considers the matter of the standing army in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, it is the errors of the individual and educational psychology which engage her to a greater degree.

In *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* Hamilton continues to suggest the dangers that idle fashion and bad taste on the domestic level represent to the nation. Thus it is the son of Mrs MacClarty, a primary representative of bad taste, who joins the army and, unaccustomed to discipline, runs away from his regiment almost immediately. The episode has disastrous results with the son, Sandie, returning to witness the death of his father, a death partly the result of his own actions (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 209 – 247). Sandie MacClarty is in fact a failure both as a citizen and as an oldest son; his lack of discipline threatens both the domestic unit and the state. In making Sandie MacClarty a soldier, Hamilton has chosen a direct way of demonstrating the dangers of incorrect association to the nation. However, she refuses to see subordination as the cause of bad taste, as Wollstonecraft had done. When she portrays Sandie becoming a soldier, then deserting, it is not his low status within the army that is Hamilton's focus. Instead, the point is clearly made that Sandie's indolence and poor taste are developed before he ever joins up. Thus,

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especially 1: xiv.

though Sandie's visit to the fair and subsequent enlistment loosely connects the army with the scene of dissipation, it is clearly his own wilful carelessness in taking the family's horse, disobeying his father and getting drunk which indirectly lead to his father's death (Hamilton, *Cottagers* 195 – 247). In fact, Hamilton suggests that, far from the army corrupting the country people, where the locals are poorly educated and without taste, it is they who present a potential threat to the defence of the nation.

*The Cottagers of Glenburnie* demonstrates that Hamilton's solution to neglect, poverty and inefficiency is not finally to be found within the restructuring of state institutions but through an education based on associationist psychology. Hamilton indicates that such an education is as necessary to those of the highest as well as the lowest ranks. Her later work develops her interest in associationist psychology and the workings of the mind in a way which perhaps explains Marilyn Butler's comment in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* that Hamilton's work grew "severer in tone" (111). In *A Series of Popular Essays* Hamilton considers correct and incorrect imagination. Imagination in uncultivated minds, she writes, forms combinations which will, "when the passions do not interfere, be like the dreams of children, made up of incongruous assemblages of external objects," and, where one passion predominates, will take its colouring from it (1: 160). Hamilton argues that "constant employment, if it be of a kind that demands attention, must necessarily impede the exercise of imagination, as idleness must, on the contrary, promote its exercise" (*Popular Essays* 1: 165). She continues with the suggestion that, "as, among the various avocations of busy life, there are some which make comparatively little demand upon the attention, and as imagination will ever, in such instances, be found extremely active," the problems that arise should be dealt with by society (*Popular Essays* 1: 165). Uncultivated imagination, it seems, is a threat to the rich and the employable as well as to the poor. In this suggestion that it is not

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<sup>263</sup>"*Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina the Wife of Germanicus*. By Elizabeth Hamilton. 3 vols. Crown 8 vo. 18s. G. and J. Robertson," *Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal, Enlarged* 45

only the ordinary people who lack taste Hamilton is similar to Wollstonecraft who had remarked in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* that by the epithet “vulgar” she:

mean[t] not only to describe a class of people, who, working to support the body, have not had time to cultivate their minds; but likewise those who, born in the lap of affluence, have never had their invention sharpened by a necessity are, nine out of ten, the creatures of habit and impulse. (Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings* 14)

However, while Wollstonecraft’s comments remain part of a greater criticism of subordination, Hamilton’s remarks are a broader comment on an economic system. Her comments indicate a belief that, in an economic structure with a high degree of specialisation, even the employed are not mentally engaged in their tasks. In short, then, in Hamilton’s account, those who profit, those who suffer and those who produce are all affected by the same malaise. They need a re-education that will ensure their imaginations are disciplined.

In considering what this corrected version of the imagination might consist of, Hamilton draws upon a British tradition which sought to connect imagination with harmony. “In the combinations which [Imagination] forms, the operations of quick discernment, ready apprehension, sound judgment, taste, and reason, will be equally conspicuous,” she remarks, suggesting that such an imagination can lead to “genius” when the faculties are “universally cultivated” and well-endowed by nature (Hamilton, *Popular Essays* 1: 158). Hamilton’s sentence suggests a balance and order to imagination which places her in the tradition of Dennis, Shaftesbury, Duff and Gerard rather than with those such as Diderot who emphasised the stimulus which struggle gives the imagination. Indeed, Hamilton stresses the need for harmony within the faculty by unusually placing intellect not as an external restraining force on imagination, but as something intrinsic to its correct working. For her, correct imagination, like a properly behaved female, is self-governing. This makes external conditions less relevant. Once more this can be usefully illustrated

by contrast with Hume's suggestion in "On the Rise of the Arts and Sciences," examined above, that for the individual to sustain a standard of taste and freedom of imagination he needs the battle of competition. Hamilton's version of correct imagination, like her version of taste, does not require this external conflict because it is characterised by inner restraint.

Hamilton's emphasis on inner restraint again forms a link between her later discussion of imagination and the events of the last decade of the eighteenth century. Reid had argued that sceptical philosophy ignored a number of truths which seemed self-evident to any thinking person. As such, those who believed it would have to distrust their own instincts, their own "common sense." This was represented in the conservative novels of the 1790s by young women who, in listening to the sceptical philosophy associated with the French Revolution, ignored their own instincts and lost their stability of self. Hamilton's insistence on a harmonious imagination which is self-restraining forms a corrective to this. It offers a redeemed imagination and controlled creation to any rightly educated person, whether male or female. Moreover, it is a corrective which, Hamilton argued, could be used in the commercial and increasingly industrial environment of the early nineteenth century.<sup>264</sup> According to Hamilton, in such an environment romance, honour and the rhetoric of chivalry were misplaced. The next chapter, however, will show the way in which Jane Porter attempted to rehabilitate both romance and the ceaseless change associated with fashion for the use of the nation.

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<sup>264</sup>In this she contrasts with Duff, who, when he described the conditions for genius, expressed a need for harmoniousness similar to Hamilton's. Duff had written that the genius of original poetry is best displayed in an "uncultivated state" because of the "simplicity and uniformity" of ancient manners as opposed to the "Diversity, Dissipation, and excessive Refinements of modern Manners" (Duff 290). Duff uses the words "uncultivated state" vaguely, but what follows suggests he is referring to a simpler economic system (and therefore a simpler social one). To him, taste and the side effects of modern commerce seem incompatible. In contrast, Hamilton, though elsewhere equally concerned at the effects of consumerism, attempts to restructure imagination to make it suitable for a commercial society.

## Chapter IV

### Jane Porter

#### i. Introduction

In her 1840 Recollective Preface to *The Scottish Chiefs* Jane Porter creates a domestic context for political commentary. To the innocuous account of the guests “often at the unpretending tea-table of [her] mother,” she adds:

In this bright little circle were also the revered female names of Mrs Hannah More, Mrs. Barbauld, the late Lady de Crespigny, (of literary and beneficent memory,) Mrs Hamilton, authoress of *Modern Philosophers*, (the fine principle and wit of which work, so put those *vain and mischievous* workers to the rout in England [. . .] We had likewise her nobly talented friend Miss Benger, the charming historian of *Anne Bullen* [sic] and *Mary Queen of Scots*.<sup>265</sup>

From the comparative safety of a footnote, Porter’s comments fifty-one years after the French Revolution ally her with Hamilton’s dislike of scepticism and atheism. However, Porter’s combination of patriotism<sup>266</sup> and imaginative historiography was

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<sup>265</sup>Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs, a Romance: Revised, Corrected, and Illustrated with a New Retrospective Introduction, Notes, & c., by the Author*, 2 vols (London: Virtue, [1840]), 1: 17; subsequently *1840 Chiefs*. Though the title page to the 1840 edition refers to the preface as “retrospective,” the opening of the introduction itself is entitled the “Recollective Preface to the illustrated edition of 1840” (1: 12). This serves to distinguish it from the 1831 retrospective preface. The “1840” edition has no date on the title page and, despite the claim of the “Recollective Preface to the Illustrated Edition, 1840,” has an appendix dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1841 (2: 479).

<sup>266</sup>See Hugh Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism,” *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel, vol 1, History and Politics (London: Routledge, 1989), 57 – 89, subsequently Cunningham, for a discussion of the changing meanings of the term “patriotism”: “In the eighteenth century patriotism was the legitimation of opposition. If a ‘formed opposition’ was thought to be unconstitutional, an assertion that such opposition was motivated by patriotism might endow it with some legitimacy” (58). He also records that while most students of the subject conclude that this sense of the word “patriotism” faded by the late eighteenth century, he believes it had a longer life (Cunningham 57). Porter’s patriotism cannot easily be identified with radicalism; neither can it be unproblematically linked with the political right. It is a placing of nation

in fact very different to the Christian associationism of Hamilton or the historical biographies of Benger.<sup>267</sup> Unlike Edgeworth, Hamilton or Baillie, Porter did not wish to discipline sentiment or mental associations; neither did she share their suspicion of romance. She wished to create a national romance which could be applied to Britain.

In order to do so, Porter had to rework certain key images of the post-revolution debate. As has been suggested, romance had come under suspicion in the 1790s. In particular, Wollstonecraft had connected Burke with romance and his chivalry and statesmanship with the changeable nature of a “celebrated beauty.” As this chapter demonstrates, Porter examined and rehabilitated a version of metamorphic beauty. Drawing on similar roles to those that Reeve had exploited, Porter made a national romance available to women. She simultaneously developed a new kind of enclosed, even feminine, but patriotic sublime. The second part of the chapter examines the way in which she adapted it so that it was applicable to peacetime. The difficulty of her project can be appreciated by examining the way images of enclosure are used in West and Austen. The final section examines how Porter pictures folk tradition as a source of national stability and to support it draws upon the notion of history painting (rather than the portraiture explored by Sophia Lee).

While the main body of the chapter examines Porter’s responses to the post-revolution debate, this introduction will explore the way in which she developed a national romance by using the history of smaller, vulnerable nations. Until recently, Porter’s role in the creation of national romance has received little critical attention

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before self-interest, which almost necessarily means a suspicion of party. It draws upon both Greek and Roman precedent (via history painting) and a notion of native heritage – this can be interestingly compared with Cunningham’s comments on patriotic radicalism – see in particular Cunningham 58.

<sup>267</sup>The nature of Porter’s acquaintance with Benger is confirmed by a letter in which Porter acts as a sponsor for her. See Jane Porter, letter to Mrs Reynolds, 1817 – 1818, British Museum Additional Manuscripts 27, 925, f. 54, Department of Manuscripts, British Library, London, where Porter describes Benger as “one of my most highly estimated friends;” and adds: “Miss Benger is a woman, whose native genius, and literary estimation, are only to be excelled by the good sense of her heart, and the ardour of her friendships.”

as has her importance to the historical novel.<sup>268</sup> In *The Rise of the Historical Novel* (1989), the second volume of the Enlightenment and Scottish Literature series, John MacQueen does not even mention Porter.<sup>269</sup> This is despite the fact that, according to his own definition of the achievement of Scott, Galt, Hogg, MacKenzie and Moore, her work is relevant. Their achievement, he writes, was:

to introduce into the fabric of their works the quality which, regardless of period, makes a particular stretch of time unique in itself; secondly, in terms of that quality, and without diminishing the individuality of separate characters, to dramatise what each author saw as the features common to human nature at all times; and thirdly, in doing so, to take into account the necessary failures, the imperfections of human knowledge and its transmission. (MacQueen 1)

Not only does a sense of location and tradition mark *The Scottish Chiefs*, but Porter's habit of historical comparison tends to dramatise the "features common" to political and individual nature. Porter is also aware of the "imperfections of human knowledge and its transmission." Such imperfections are not such a matter of

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<sup>268</sup> Porter's work has not been dogged with the same degree of controversy about categorisation as *The Recess*. See, for example, "The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance. By Miss Jane Porter, Author of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, & c. 5 vols. 12 mo. 1l. 15s. Longman and Co.," rev. of *The Scottish Chiefs, a Romance*, by Jane Porter, *The Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany: Being a General Repository of Literature, History, and Politics* (1810): 278 – 83. The reviewer found a conflict between history and entertainment in *The Scottish Chiefs* as "the events of real history are not arranged for the purpose of amusing the world" (279). He worries about "False impressions" of history, but adds: "Miss Porter boasts, indeed, and we believe with reason, that she has bestowed great pains to render her narrative conformable to, or at least not inconsistent with, the truth of history. Such diligence is certainly meritorious," though: "Pleasure, not instruction, must be the leading aim of such compositions" (279). Baker in his *History of the English Novel* is not worried about referring to Porter's work as a "historical novel" (134). He mentions that *The Scottish Chiefs*, being scrupulously researched, has "all the ingredients, in short, that could be prescribed for a good historical novel" except that it does not show Scott's abilities (Baker 134). In particular, he finds an "entire lack of the historical imagination," and the "inability to summon up a past epoch" (Baker 134, 135). More recently, Gary Kelly in *English Fiction of the Romantic Period* refers to Porter's works as both " 'national tales' " and " 'historical romances' ," his use of inverted commas suggesting some discomfort with the labels (*English Fiction* 94; Baker 134). See also Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, eds. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 183 - 85., where, reflecting this epistemological uncertainty, Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell do not explicitly give *The Scottish Chiefs* any label bolder than novel, though nationalism, romance and an "historical basis" are all referred to (183 – 85).

<sup>269</sup> John MacQueen, *The Rise of the Historical Novel*, The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic P, 1989); subsequently MacQueen.



anxiety for her as for Hogg in the *Private Memoirs* (1824), for example, yet her lack of detail in citing her sources and footnoting is itself of interest.<sup>270</sup>

Porter had been exposed to the sentimental historiography that had emerged in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Unlike such writers as the Lees, Porter did not wish to emphasise the problem of coherent narrative or the gap between public narrative and private emotion. Instead, in her historical romance Porter insisted on the importance of a complete bond between national narrative and sentiment in a way that makes her an important and unusual figure in the development of the national romance. Porter's significance to the genre has been acknowledged by Nicola J. Watson in *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790 - 1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (1994).<sup>271</sup> Watson recognises Porter's significance to the development of the historical and regional novel in the years of the Napoleonic Wars. Though Watson only briefly discusses *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, she makes the important point that, "rather than recruiting sentimental energy in the constitution of national identity, [it] attempts instead simply to supersede the sentimental plot in favour of national romance."<sup>272</sup> Porter wished to create a "national romance" and, as this introduction demonstrates, the key to this lies in her treatment of small nationalisms and in her creation of a distinctive editorial voice.

Porter came to use a fictionalised form of history to support patriotism and in the process she cultivated a suitable and increasingly elaborate authorial persona quite unlike any that have so far been mentioned. In her description of her influences, Porter constructed a female spectator particularly affected by the sublime of heroism. She recounts her exposure to heroism in the 1831 edition of *Thaddeus of*

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<sup>270</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. Written by Himself with a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts and Other Evidence by the Editor* (1824), ed. John Carey (London: Oxford UP, 1969).

<sup>271</sup> Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790 - 1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1994); subsequently *Revolution*.

<sup>272</sup> Watson 118 – 19; Watson describes how *Thaddeus's* Poland, in its fight for independence, acts as a regional displacement of both *ancien regime* France and England under threat of invasion from Napoleon. She suggests that in the latter half of the novel:

Warsaw in "The Author to her Friendly readers." In 1794 the Porter family had moved to London so that Porter's brother, Robert, could further pursue his vocation as an artist. During this period Porter recalls seeing Polish refugees in St James's Park. She recalls one individual who had "melancholy and bravery stamped on his emaciated features" (Porter, *Thaddeus* SN viii). The combination of heroism and suffering seeming to attract her particularly. This is also evident in Porter's account of her time in Edinburgh, where the family moved in 1780. There, according to the 1831 "Retrospective Introduction," she saw the widows of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion at their garret windows in Edinburgh. She further alleges that she met Jeannie Cameron, mistress of Charles Edward Stuart. To this account of melancholy heroism Porter later added a more literary dimension. In the 1840 "Recollective Preface," Porter remarked how, despite the family's lack of wealth, her mother allowed numerous visitors to their home, including a youthful Walter Scott.<sup>273</sup> However, if Porter met Scott at all at this stage, it could only have been extremely briefly, taking into account a letter which Jane Porter wrote to Walter Scott while living in Long Ditton.<sup>274</sup> The letter suggests their formal acquaintance to be of a later date. Porter writes:

I am unwilling to resist the strong impulse I feel to do perhaps, a very strange thing! - that is, write to you in this old-acquaintance-like way, when I have only been so recently introduced in person to you. - But it is my pride, as the royal

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"Transposed into England, revolution is now represented in terms of a residual novel of sensibility" (Watson, *Revolution* 120 - 21).

<sup>273</sup>Porter's own suggestion in the 1840 Recollective Preface is that she had known Scott in her childhood, "for the days of his student youth and of my childhood had mingled together in Edinburgh, where our mothers had been intimate friends. We had never met since that period, until after the publication of [*The Scottish Chiefs*]" (1840 *Chiefs* 39).

<sup>274</sup>See Jane Porter, Letter to Walter Scott, 18--, Department of Manuscripts RP 670, British Library, London. See also A. D. Hook, "Jane Porter, Sir Walter Scott, and the Historical Novel," *Clio: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 5 (1976): 181 - 92. Though Porter herself records meeting Scott around the time of the publication of *The Scottish Chiefs*, A. D. Hook puts it at a later date: "During his visit to London in 1815 Scott almost certainly renewed an old acquaintanceship with Jane Porter" (181).

Louis dated his reign, to count my knowledge of Mr *Walter*

Scott from the farthest date it will bear.

Porter's avowal in the 1840 preface of their early meeting reflects her increasing insistence on the importance of the fictional form as a vehicle for patriotic history.

It was perhaps Porter's appreciation for the melancholic that lead to what the *Monthly Review* of September 1799 called the "Species of eloquence, which may be termed the false pathetic" characterising her first work, *The Spirit of the Elbe* (1799), a gothic romance.<sup>275</sup> In 1801 she followed this with *The Two Princes of Persia*, which describes the brothers Omra and Behauder. In the *Dictionary of National Biography* Michael Adams suggests that the basis for their characters might have been the personalities of Jane and her sister, Anna Maria Porter – S. C. Hall remarks: "The one being sombre, the other gay, we used to speak of them as L' Allegro and Il Penseroso."<sup>276</sup> Intriguingly, however, in "The Author to her Friendly Readers" Porter recalled how her family had named one particularly melancholy Polish refugee "Il Penseroso" (*Thaddeus* SN ix). The shared name indicates the extent to which Porter's authorial identity was based on the description of such national heroes. Porter's self-presentation relied upon an increasingly poignant awareness of heroism.

Porter's melancholy provides an important indicator that her interest was not in the affiliation of greatness and military success but in the struggle of small nations against larger imperial forces. Reversing Hazlitt's representation of "the language of poetry" and "the language of power," her novel *Thaddeus of Warsaw* depicts the

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<sup>275</sup>Michael Adams, "Jane Porter (1780 – 21 September 1832)," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge, vol. 116 (Detroit, MI: Brucoli, 1992), 264 – 270, see particularly 265; subsequently Adams. See Nicholas A. Joukovsky, "Jane Porter's First Novel: The Evidence of an Unpublished Letter," *Notes and Queries* 235 [ns 37] (1990): 15 – 17; "Art. 18. *The Spirit of the Elbe*, a Romance. 12mo. 3 vols. 9s. Boards. Longman. 1799," review of *The Spirit of the Elbe* by Jane Porter, *Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal*, *Enlarged* 30 (1799): 93.

<sup>276</sup>Adams 266; Samuel Carter Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life: from 1815 to 1883*, vol 2 (London: Bentley, 1883), 143 – 45, quoted from 144. An alternative comparison, given the princes' instruction by a philosopher teacher, Sadi, might be with the princes of *Rasselas* (1759) and *Dinarbus* (1790), the former schooled into a greater degree of melancholic indifference to the world than the more sociable latter. See Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759), Ellis Cornelia Knight, *Dinarbas; A Tale* (1790), ed. Lynne Melocco, Everyman (London: Dent; Vermont: Tuttle, 1994); subsequently *Rasselas* and *Dinarbas* respectively.

heroism of a difficult or fruitless struggle against a stronger invader.<sup>277</sup> As Porter notes in her preface to the 1831 edition, she apparently decided to write about the war in Poland after her brother, Robert, met General Kosciuszko who “spoke to him words of generous encouragement, in whatever path of virtuous ambition he might take” (Porter, *Thaddeus SN x*). Due to the General’s modesty, and her own, she did not make him her hero, but “took a younger, and less pretending agent, in the personification of a descendent of the great John Sobieski” (Porter, *Thaddeus SN x*). This enabled her to construct a romance with the scale of history, but the flexibility of a novel. The novel begins with Thaddeus’s mother telling him the tale of her desertion by her mysterious husband, Mr Sackville. Thaddeus determines to forget his paternal ancestry and determines to view himself instead as the grandson of Sobieski. He then demonstrates his prowess as a military hero, after which he is forced to leave Poland and flee to England, the country of his father. Here he undergoes the trials of a penniless refugee, before finding out that he is the son of Sir Robert Somerset. Thaddeus voluntarily remains under the name of his mother’s family and his legitimacy goes unacknowledged while his noble younger brother continues to enjoy the position of firstborn. In Porter’s novel the displacement caused by imperialism is conveniently minimised as plot allows Thaddeus to regain status through the maternal line.

Most importantly, Porter’s plot demonstrates the importance of British admiration for the struggle of the small nation. Porter’s initially Polish national romance emphasises the importance of the liberty associated with Britain. Furthermore, one reviewer of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* explicitly connects Poland’s struggle with Russia in the novel with Britain’s campaign against Napoleon.<sup>278</sup> The reason for the reviewer’s association is self-evident when it is remembered that in

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<sup>277</sup>William Hazlitt, *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, introd. Tom Paulin, vol. 1 (London: Pickering, 1998); see in particular his essay on “Coriolanus” (125 – 31), especially 125.

<sup>278</sup>See “Art. IV. *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. By Miss Porter. 12mo. 4 vols. about 220 pages each,” rev. of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, by Jane Porter, *Annual Review/ JAS* 2 (1803): 604 – 605, Sheffield Hallam Corvey, 25 Feb 2000, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3/ContribPage.cfm?Contrib=290>.

the year of the publication of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, London was not just a home for refugees but itself believed under threat of French invasion.<sup>279</sup> Poland's national romance becomes an inspiration for Britain's. Circumstances in *The Scottish Chiefs* encourage a similar view of thirteenth-century Scotland. In particular, the novel's examination of the role of popular support for a regime and the necessity of prizing military talent as well as birthright in times of battle reflect the changing circumstances in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars.

Since the publication of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, the fear of French invasion led to legislation which researched how many males each county had, as well as how many had arms or were in the militia (Colley 285 - 91). Firearms were entrusted to men through out the British Isles and, as Colley notes, the repressive attitude to popular participation in national life, which the administration had adopted after the French Revolution, was abandoned (310). The mass participation of a nation's people in issues of government and the responsibilities of the aristocracy to the state became important issues in *The Scottish Chiefs*. The novel depicts William Wallace stepping in to save his country with the people's backing while the Scottish nobles are reluctant to take unified action. In other words, it examines the effects of properly led popular action when the aristocracy fails to serve.

Related to the national tale and coinciding with a growing literary interest in the Scottish highlands (as suggested both by *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* and Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, 1810), there has been some discussion as to whether *The Scottish Chiefs* in turn influenced *Waverley*.<sup>280</sup> If so, the influence was mutual. In her "Recollective Preface" to the 1840 edition of *The Scottish Chiefs* Porter emphasises the romance of Scottish history yet gives a sense of its distance; Jacobitism is romantic rather than threatening. Her account of the immediate inspiration for *The*

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<sup>279</sup> At the time when fears of a French invasion were mounting, W. O. Porter wrote to Mrs Jane Porter at 6 Gerrard Street, London, from the Isle of Skye to invite his sisters to pay him a visit if the invasion proved "more than threats." See William Ogilvie Porter, letter to Jane [Blenkinsop] Porter, 6 August 1803, Porter Family Correspondence A, Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections, Durham.

*Scottish Chiefs* distances it from Scottish independence and makes it more likely that the novel's function was to construct a British rather than a Scottish romance:

Sir John Moore, my dear absent brother's "master in arms," had just closed his career of devotedness to "England's glory" on the heights of Corunna; and many of the gallant leaders, (also our friends) who had followed his brave footsteps thither, had likewise found their "gory bed" on the same weeping field of victory. It might then have been truly said, "Alas for Caledonia! *The flowers of her forest are again wed away!*" and for some of them being of the race of the chiefs of my early admiration, I felt as if sweetly though sadly mingling a silent *lament* for the sons, in the *Coronach* my pen then meditated to raise to the memories of their forefathers. (19 – 20)

Porter's emphasis on the bravery of Scottish soldiers acting as part of the British army indicates her attention was focused on British unity against any larger threat. Somewhat expediently, Porter argued that there was a point at which the struggle of a small, conquered nation against a larger became futile or unnecessary – particularly when the conquerors of such a nation combined some connection to its hereditary rulers with capable government. This indicates that Porter was far less concerned with Scottish independence than with fiction as a method of consolidation for Britain.

In 1815 Porter published another novel, *The Pastor's Fireside* which traces the relationship between heroism, national interests and domestic life.<sup>281</sup> It begins at

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<sup>280</sup>Walter Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, introd. Andrew Lang, 48 vols (London: Nimmo, 1893 – 1895), see especially vols 1 and 2; subsequently *Waverley Novels*. For the question of Porter's influence on Scott, see the final section of the chapter.

<sup>281</sup>Jane Porter, *The Pastor's Fireside, a Novel* (1815), introd. Jane Porter, 2 vols, Standard Novels 18 - 19 (London: Colburn and Bentley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Dublin: Cumming; Paris: Galignani, 1832); subsequently *Pastor*. Though not as successful as *The Scottish Chiefs*, it was still being enjoyed several years later, as suggested by a letter from William Ogilvie Porter to Jane on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1817. He writes to ask that she give her signature to his autograph-collecting friend, W. P. Lervell [?] Esq. He "is now reading your *Pastor's Fireside*, and in common with everyone of taste is incessantly charmed by the uninterrupted interest of the whole, and that charm warmed into admiration, by the unstopping elegance of the stile [sic], and vast diffusivity of its Christian sentiments." See

Lindesfarne, where the atmosphere of national romance is generated by the hero's meetings with the Jacobite Duke Wharton. The romance is extended when Louis moves to the Austrian court at the command of his father, Duke de Ripperda, and is promptly surrounded by intrigue. Ripperda's plans for the good of Europe fail and he is accused by Spain of being a traitor. Embittered, the Duke becomes a follower of Islam and attacks Spanish holdings in Africa. The disenchanted Louis is able to reconvert his father on his deathbed, before returning to domestic life in Britain along with the eventually reclaimed Duke Wharton. Wharton, on the accession of George II, whom he believes to be a monarch with talent and hereditary right, decides that his cause is unnecessary, and thus the opposition between talent and birthright disintegrates, as it had in *The Scottish Chiefs*. In addition, in this novel the national romance becomes an international romance when Porter emphasises the need for Christian solidarity against the Islamic other.

After *The Pastor's Fireside* was published, Porter began to turn her attention to play writing. Michael Adams notes that the first play, *Egmont, or the Eve of St Alyne* was seen and liked by Edmund Kean, but it was neither acted nor published (Adams 268). *Switzerland* was performed once in London's Theatre Royal on Drury Lane on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1819. In *Some Account of the English Stage* Genest's entry, with typical obscurity, reads: "Never acted, Switzerland – Kean – H. Kemble – H. Johnston – D. Fisher – Hamblin – Mrs Glover – Mrs W. West – this T[ragedy] was written by Miss Porter – it was acted but once" (viii: 683). On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1822 *Owen, Prince of Powys* was staged at the same place but was acted only three times (Genest ix: 146).

Porter's patriotic intentions are also evident in the story of the composition of her next novel, *Duke Christian of Luneberg, or Traditions of the Hartz*, published in 1824. Porter records in her recollective preface to the illustrated edition of *The Scottish Chiefs* (1840) that it was written in response to a request from the Reverend

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William Ogilvie Porter, letter to Jane Porter, 7 March 1817, Porter Family Correspondence A, Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, Durham.

Dr James Stanier Clarke (39). Dr Clarke, librarian to George IV, suggested that the King's ancestor, Duke Christian of Brunswick-Luneberg, would make a good subject for a novel. On one of the Porters' short visits to London Dr Clarke told Jane Porter:

that his Majesty having had the works of the sister of Sir Robert Ker Porter recalled to his recollection by the then recent publication of her brother's '*Travels in Persia*,' &c., (which were dedicated to the King,) he took my early published volumes from the royal shelf, and was so satisfied with the historical fidelity of the heroes they portrayed that Dr. Clarke was commanded to communicate to me his Majesty's gracious request that my next subject should be 'The Life of his great and virtuous progenitor, Duke Christian of Luneberg.' (1840 *Chiefs* 39)

In following Dr Clarke's suggestion, Porter proved to be more co-operative than Jane Austen had been. Nine years earlier Jane Austen had dedicated *Emma* to the Prince Regent on the suggestion of Dr Clarke.<sup>282</sup> Clarke had also given her several suggestions for a novel, first advising her to base one on an English clergyman, then recommending that she write about the House of Saxe-Coburg in complement to Prince Leopold who was going to marry the Prince Regent's daughter, Charlotte – Austen excused herself by saying the project was beyond her (Tomalin 249).

After *Duke Christian of Luneberg*, Jane Porter collaborated with her sister over a collection of four short stories, *Tales Round a Winter Hearth* (1826). In the 1840 recollective preface Porter remarks that in her tale "The Old House of Hontercombe, or Berenice's Pilgrimage," she was inspired by Sir Robert Ker's travels. *Tales Round a Winter Hearth* claimed to explore an Irish and a Scottish tradition and also contained a narrative of rural hardship, intensified by military strife. However, the differing traditions and political problems referred to in the tales are placed by the final story in the context of a unifying story of Christian



virtue. In 1828 this interest in national unity was continued, as Anna-Maria and Jane Porter repeated their collaborative experiment with the three volume *Coming Out, and the Field of Forty Footsteps*, the former by Anna-Maria and the latter by Jane.<sup>283</sup> While Anna Maria's work was about society life, Jane had written a tale of national strife and tradition, based during the Commonwealth. Indeed, only Jane's last novel-based project, editing her brother's manuscript of *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative of his Shipwreck and Consequent Discovery of Certain Islands in the Caribbean Sea: With a Detail of Many Extraordinary and Highly Interesting Events in His Life, from the Year 1733 to 1749 as Written in His Own Diary* (1831), represented a major departure from her interest in national identity.

Porter employed the national romance to promote a common Christian identity and shared patriotism within the British Isles. In using both Scottish and Irish tradition the Porter sisters were part of a much wider trend; as Katie Trumpener remarks: "It might be argued, indeed, that for a brief moment at the beginning of the nineteenth century [ . . . ] the intense mutual influence of Scottish and Irish novelists on each other and on the novel-readers of both nations begins to constitute something like a trans-peripheral Irish-Scottish public sphere" (689).<sup>284</sup> However, Porter's application of national romance by inference to Britain is distinct. In addition, her historical interests and privileging of the national plot at the expense of the sentimental give her work a different aspect from, for example, Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* or Edgeworth's *Ormond* (1817).<sup>285</sup> In both the unifying force between the two nations is the sentimental plot of marriage. In the former the Irish heroine finally convinces the hero of her own worth and that of Irish culture. In the latter, after the pernicious French influence of Dora is removed, the hero's love for the responsible, cultured Miss Annaly aids him in becoming a

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<sup>282</sup>Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking, 1997), 247.

<sup>283</sup>Anna Maria Porter and Jane Porter, *Coming Out and The Field of Forty Footsteps*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1828); subsequently *Footsteps*.

<sup>284</sup>Porter's interest in national identity relates her to this group, despite her London publishers, Longman (who also published Jane West and, in 1811, Brunton's *Self-Control*).

<sup>285</sup>Maria Edgeworth, *Ormond* (1817), illus. Carl Schloesser, Gill's Irish Classics (Dublin: Gill, 1990).

responsible landowner of the Black Islands. A further difference between Edgeworth and Porter is their treatment of national romance. In *Ormond*, for example, the hero, made suitably civilised, replaces King Corny whose feudal island kingship operated on sentiment and tradition. For Edgeworth, as for Scott in *Waverley*, the journey must be made from tradition and national romance to a more rational world view. For much of her career Porter, in contrast, preserves and extends the national romance.

This chapter explores Jane Porter's exploration of the sublime and the beautiful. Porter redefined a version of Burke's "beauty" which, through Wollstonecraft's writing, had become connected with certain forms of statesmanlike behaviour. Porter examined and rehabilitated a version of metamorphic beauty. At the same time, she also associated the ideal public life with qualities considered feminine. This feminisation cannot be read as removing women into some ultra-feminine separate sphere, or denying them a public voice, as it might be constructed according to earlier feminist histories. Instead, Porter places feminine values at the heart of the national romance by redefining the sublime. This chapter shows Porter's insistence on the domestic hearth or enclosed space as the home of the patriotic sublime. Porter's enclosed sublime was, however, hard to maintain, and the second half of the chapter suggests the alterations in her stance and the alternative versions of patriotic enclosure present in the work of Austen and West. Finally, the chapter explores Porter's use of the traditional, the folk tale and the domestic.

## **ii. Changeable beauty and the heroic sublime. Rewriting the British Subject**

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft attacks Burke's association of feminine beauty and weakness, worrying that the homage that accompanies protective gallantry "vitiates [women], prevents their endeavouring to

obtain solid personal merit; and, in short, makes those beings vain inconsiderate dolls, who ought to be prudent mothers and useful members of society” (*Political Writings* 24). According to Wollstonecraft, beauty as Burke employed it in the *Reflections* is a political malaise that effects the statesmen who use the related rhetoric of romance as well as women. Wollstonecraft suggests this by repeated attempts to cast Burke in the role of the beautiful female. He has the feminine qualities of a “lively imagination,” and his productions are “desultory,” rather as a lady’s sketches might be (Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings* 5). He is interested in display and “instantaneous applause,” but, like a woman’s, his faults could have been forgiven had he kept them in a “private circle” (Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings* 5 – 6). A wit, such as Burke, is in fact like a “celebrated beauty” (Wollstonecraft, *Political Writings* 6). This beautiful version of Burke is also associated with deceitful and erroneous political behaviour. Relying on “witty arguments and ornamental feelings” rather than reason, Burke involves himself in “slavish paradoxes,” becoming the personification of moral weakness and corruption that Wollstonecraft wishes to associate with “implicit submission to authority” (*Political Writings* 6, 7, 13). The changeable, corruptible statesman Wollstonecraft constructs, a statesman capable of the most violent transformations of opinion, is a beauty. Furthermore, in his corruption he is willing to employ the language of romance.

The association of political corruptness with Burke’s model of feminine beauty was lasting, as suggested by the qualities of Mr Churchill, wit and coquette, in Edgeworth’s 1834 novel, *Helen*.<sup>286</sup> The politicisation of the beautiful (and hence femininity) had made the feminine a potentially significant metonymic counter in the discussion of national and political life. Particularly important was the changeability of the celebrated beauty. Female metamorphosis became a topic with political resonance, and was used to discuss female patriotism and statesmanship. Such

shape-shifting and its association with certain social structures, for example, is slightly touched upon in the Lees' *The Canterbury Tales*. In Sophia Lee's "The Two Emilys" both the manipulative disguises of the villainess, Emily Arden, and the more simple changes in the heroine's appearance occur as a result of the misuse of hereditary power, rather as Wollstonecraft had implied they might. However, no larger political framework is provided to suggest the national or governmental results of such behaviour.

The symbolism of female cross-dressing inherited by Porter had a new urgency, largely as a result of the political activities of Wollstonecraft, Williams, Hays and other women involved in the French Revolution debate. Their activities, with their traditionally masculine connotations, had promoted a politicisation of the imagery of cross-dressing. Earlier in the century narratives of female cross-dressing concentrated upon working class women who gained social and financial benefits by wearing men's clothes. As Catherine Craft-Fairchild notes in her article "Cross-dressing and the Novel: Women Warriors and Domestic Fiction," in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the portrayal of transvestism is associated with the "corruptions of morals and behaviour regarded as inherent in women of independent means and genteel education."<sup>287</sup> What Craft-Fairchild does not note is that portrayals of cross-dressing and laboured descriptions of their moral consequences in the years after the revolution were essentially political. Models of sentimentality and their moral effects, mainly on women, were important vehicles for discussion of political change for both conservatives and radicals; the exploration of cross-dressing is an almost inevitable development from this because of the perceived masculinity or "unsex'd" nature of politically active females. Variations in the portrayals of the cross-dressing women are as politically revealing as descriptions of (female) sensibility.

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<sup>286</sup>Mr Churchill is played upon by vanity and the love of applause, and is, moreover, a flirt - Edgeworth's narrator significantly connects Churchill with Rousseau's model of beauty (Edgeworth, *Helen* 179).

<sup>287</sup>Catherine Craft-Fairchild, "Cross-Dressing and the Novel: Women Warriors and Domestic Femininity," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10 (1998): 171 – 202, quoted from 179.

This section will use Porter to demonstrate how the imagery of changeable female beauty and romance carried political significance. As will be seen, Porter used the symbolism of female metamorphosis and cross-dressing, contentious after the Revolutionary debate, to explore both political behaviour and female participation in the state. Porter is an example of the way in which the imagery of female cross-dressing, so often used as an argument against female political involvement, could, even after Polwhele's "Unsex'd Females," be used in the opposite way.

*The Scottish Chiefs* explores several such versions of female metamorphosis. The first exhibits the bad characteristics associated with transformation. The novel's villainess, Lady Joanna Mar is strikingly similar to the "celebrated beauty" Wollstonecraft had suggested that Burke exemplified. Joanna's weakness is not physical, but moral. Her propensity to change and disguise herself is suggested on her first meeting with Wallace, after she and her husband have been rescued from de Valance in Dumbarton Castle, when "from the graces of her person, and the address with which she set forth all her charms, the enchanted gazer found it impossible to suppose her more than three or four and twenty" (*Chiefs* 1: 203). Lady Mar, creating a deceptive image of youth, is shape-changing and "enchanted," linked to the witches of romance. Her aesthetic is based on illusion and, unlike that of Helen, the heroine, is strictly concentrated on the bodily and personal. It connects the mirage of youth, with all its sexual allure, to the image of power: "Lennox thought she looked more like some triumphant queen, than a wife who had so lately shared captivity with an outlawed husband" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 204). The woman, Porter suggests, who, instead of being an aesthetic subject, deliberately transforms herself into a work of art will be animal and ambitious. The deceptive nature of the transformations Lady Mar undergoes is underlined by the episode of the Knight of the Green Plume who appears at Wallace's camp, refuses to reveal his name, and fights alongside Wallace, only to endanger the cause by intercepting important letters from Bruce (*Chiefs* 2: 235 – 76). This knight, Wallace eventually discovers, is

none other than Lady Mar (2: 252). In this role her clothing, equivocal allegiances and unwillingness to reveal her identity all suggest her ambiguous political and sexual intentions. Thus Porter links the voluntary transformation of appearance with willingness to change allegiance politically.

To further suggest Joanna's tendency to transform herself, Porter puts in place a system of literary parallels, significantly appealing to both the epic and romance traditions. In order to suggest Joanna Mar's corruption Porter follows a technique Milton had employed in *Paradise Lost*. She places her in a classical rather than a Christian context. When Wallace enters the Mars' room at Dumbarton, Joanna "looked as Venus did when she beheld the God of War rise from a field of blood" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 190). Similarly, when rescued by Wallace at Stirling, she is referred to entering "like Juno, in all her plumage of majesty and beauty" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 309).<sup>288</sup> Porter is also influenced by Spenser. In the introduction to the 1831 edition of *The Scottish Chiefs* Porter emphasises her work's connection with romance with the remark that, "having quitted Scotland while still a child [. . .] the 'Fairy Queen', 'Sidney's Arcadia,' and other tales of English chivalry, soon took their share in dividing [her] admiration with the Scottish heroes" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: xx). She associates Lady Mar with several of Spenser's temptresses. For example, Joanna persuades Wallace to take her to safety on the *Rothsay*, distracting him away from the business of war. On the voyage to the island Wallace, Lady Mar and the other passengers in their vessel are threatened first by the rocks of Arran (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 224), then by a whirlpool (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 225). This is very similar to the journey the traveller will have to undertake if he wishes to reach Acrasia's Bowre of Blisse. To get there, on the one side, he must pass the "*Gulfe of Greedinesse*" (131, 2. 12. 3), a whirlpool, and on the other "an hideous Rocke" (131, 2. 12. 4).<sup>289</sup> In

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<sup>288</sup>Notably, almost the only usage of this imagery with regard to Wallace comes from the Queen of France, the rest of the time, both he and Helen are referred to by Christian imagery (Porter, *Chiefs* 2: 222).

<sup>289</sup>Additionally, once on the island and establishing a rural idyll, Lady Mar shows some similarity to Phædria in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* who ferried Guyon over the "Idle lake" (95, 2. 6. 10) "that might his constant hart/ Withdraw from thought of warlike enterprize./ And drowne in dissolute delights apart" (95, 2. 6. 25). Joanna is also "meaning to beguile,

Porter's hands, the enchantress of romance, with her fluctuating desires and allegiances, becomes a danger to the national cause.

According to Porter, such an enchantress as Joanna exploits the kind of gallantry Wollstonecraft ascribes to Burke. Porter's exploration suggests that changeable beauty alongside an adherence to gallantry is dangerous for a female and for the state. In Porter's fiction, the behaviour of women and statesmen have substantial similarities. Furthermore, Porter does not just stop with a description of negative public qualities. Through her heroine, Helen, she offers another definition of beauty which relates to Wollstonecraft's redefinition of it. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft had remarked that, "for truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful."<sup>290</sup> Wollstonecraft's choice of simplicity stands in contrast to the duplicity and metamorphosis she connects with Burke's definition of beauty; in the same way, Helen's attractions contrast with Joanna's "splendour." Important constituents of Helen's attractiveness are her virtue and simplicity. To a patriot such as Wallace, her straightforward physical attractiveness is irrelevant besides her moral purity. For example, when she first realises her rescuer is Wallace she becomes abashed. Her modesty is such that it seems to Joanna, with her conventional interpretation of beauty, that she need not worry about her rival's power because "all the splendour of beauty [. . .] was fled. Her unadorned garments, gave no particular attraction to the simple lines of her form" (*Chiefs* 1: 310). However, Wallace saw "the compassionate saint, who had given a hallowed grave to the remains of an angel

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and destroy, that manly spirit, by soft delights, which a continuance in war's rugged scenes, she thought, was too likely to render invulnerable" (*Chiefs* 1: 234). Furthermore connecting Joanna with literary enchantresses and shape changers, when Murray tells Wallace of the banquet for which Lady Mar desires him to stay at *Rothsay*, he adds in jest, "and if you do not stay to partake it [. . .] we may expect all the witches in the isle will be bribed to sink us before we reach the shore" (*Chiefs* 1: 234).

<sup>290</sup>*Political Writings* 5; in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft makes a related comment when attacking Burke's "spirit of romance and chivalry" and use of rhetoric: "In modern poetry the understanding and memory often fabricate the pretended effusions of the heart, and romance destroys all simplicity; which, in works of taste, is but a synonymous word for truth" (*Political Writings* 28). In the area of taste, simplicity, truth and beauty are, Wollstonecraft claims, identical. In opposition she places romance and, considering Porter's subject matter in *The Scottish Chiefs*, this suggests the political distance between them.

[Wallace's wife], pure as herself" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 311). In other words, Helen, like the heroine of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, Mary Beaufort, does not seek to transform herself into an aesthetic object. The heroine, educated in the oral tradition of patriotism, attracts because of her actions. Helen's mode of beauty suggests that Porter, with her religious outlook, agrees with Wollstonecraft in linking purity and beauty.

However, Wollstonecraft's simplicity has rather different political consequences from Porter's, as an examination of Porter's model beauty alongside Wollstonecraft's thought will suggest. Wollstonecraft imagines that simplicity, the removal of all disguise, will be facilitated by the limitation of hereditary transfer of property. In such circumstances, the deceitful morality of master and slave vanishes. Porter, on the other hand, chooses to picture her simplicity within a framework of hereditary property. This compromise makes a degree of female disguise necessary. Here Porter sites herself firmly within the romance tradition. Reeve realised that a degree of playful masquerade could make a more impressive female literary history. In her work, the transformations of romance are seen as legitimate practice for women - circumstance makes them necessary. Similarly, in Sophia Lee's "The Two Emilys" the heroine transforms herself because it is expedient. Fifteen years later, in a national narrative, Porter's heroine also finds it imperative to transform herself.

The metamorphosis of Porter's heroine, Helen, takes place in the second volume when she is removed from the legitimate protection of her male relatives and taken captive by de Valence. Rescued by Wallace, she has to assume the disguise of pageboy to downplay the irregularities of her situation. Her ordinary social position is compromised by her lack of the protection of father or husband; therefore, she has freedom to create another, temporary identity. The persona of the pageboy which she chooses in this situation is connected with masculinity but only in its less threatening, adolescent form. On the one hand, then, Porter's heroine, as pageboy

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However, in the hands of Porter, romance is not quite so consistently conservative as Wollstonecraft might suppose, particularly when Helen's role is taken into account.



rather than Knight of the Green Plume, takes a relatively minor role in national terms. On the other hand, Porter has suggested that war makes it expedient for women to change, displaying qualities which appear more masculine. She has in fact reworked the pageboy convention so that female activity on a national level appears less threatening. Craft-Fairchild argues: “The demise of the transgressive woman leaves the domestic woman in full possession of the field,” but *The Scottish Chiefs* suggests that the metaphor of the female transvestite is used in more complex ways (Craft-Fairchild 182).

Particularly significant is Porter’s treatment of Helen’s sexuality. After *The Scottish Chiefs* male writers were also to use the pageboy motif. In the hands of Scott and Byron, women’s involvement in political life, portrayed obliquely through female cross-dressing, was increasingly sexualised. While Porter removes from Helen’s involuntary metamorphosis all associations with the kind of beauty Wollstonecraft links to Burke, the pages of Scott and Byron possess the more dangerous attributes of changeable beauty. In *Marmion*, for example, Constance de Beverly, Marmion’s lover, is a “Sister profess’d of Fontevraud” who, having run away from her convent, disguises herself as a page in order to be Marmion’s mistress.<sup>291</sup> She also helps Marmion to have De Wilton branded as a traitor, so that Marmion can marry the woman of his choice. She aids her lover in obtaining another, more virtuous woman, and is the subject of innuendo:

His skin was fair, his ringlets gold,  
His bosom - when he sigh’d,  
The russet doublet’s rugged fold,  
Could scarce repel its pride!  
Say, hast thou given that lovely youth  
To serve in lady’s bower?  
Or was the gentle page, in sooth,

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<sup>291</sup> Walter Scott, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott: Including Introduction and Notes* (London: Warne, n.d.) 107 – 60, see in particular 60, 2. 20; subsequently *Poetical Works*.

Breaker of religious vows, sexualised by gallantry and in disguise, Scott's page plays games with politics. Byron's page, Kaled, in his poem, *Lara* (1814), is similarly sexual.<sup>292</sup> Lara himself has come back from foreign lands no longer a Christian, and in addition to having some secret burden, eventually gives the peasants their freedom only so that they will help him in his fight against his own class:

What cared he for the freedom of the crowd?

He raised the humble but to bend the proud. (Byron, 244, 2. 9)

Though surrounded by mystery, female metamorphosis is still implicitly linked to unwise or badly motivated political decisions. Helen, on the other hand, though disguised as a page, has for Wallace a "passion of the soul" rather than "what the herd generally entitle love" and when she returns to normal clothing Porter emphasises that she gains, "the decorum of rank and situation! - not of the heart; - that had never been absent from the conduct of Helen: had she been in the wilds of Africa, with no other companion than Wallace, still would those chaste reserves, [ . . . ] have been there the guardians of her actions" (Porter, *Chiefs* 2: 213, 2: 216). Helen's personal love for Wallace is to a large extent displaced by her love of her country.

Porter's alteration of the meaning of metamorphic female beauty suggests an ongoing dialogue with Wollstonecraft. Her dismissal of the more manly cross-dressing female signifies her rejection of the radicalism of the unsex'd females but it is simultaneously a dismissal of the Burkean statesmanship which Wollstonecraft associated with "celebrated beauty" (*Political Works* 6). However, the transformations of Porter's heroine indicates that Porter thought a degree of compromise and disguise was necessary in politics. Wollstonecraft would have

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<sup>292</sup>George Gordon Noel Byron, 6<sup>th</sup> baron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980 - 1993) ; poem 225, 3: 214 - 256.

seen such compromise as dangerous. She attacked the “celebrated beauty” whatever the political shade of its proponents. For example, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she criticised Rousseau for promoting in women “the advantage of gracefully adapting their looks” rather than cultivating their reason (*Political Writings* 159). Twentieth-century critics are similarly suspicious, not only regarding the beauty myth, but also when considering the displacement of feminine values onto male characters. Rhonda Batchelor, for example, argues that women are displaced from the public space by the feminisation of the hero. She uses *The Scottish Chiefs* to support her suggestion that the early nineteenth century saw an erosion of the genuine voice of woman in the public arena as heroes such as Wallace become increasingly feminised (Batchelor 356). Her argument represents a version of feminist history similar to that challenged by Amanda Vickery.<sup>293</sup> Vickery highlights a common form of feminist history in which, after enjoying a golden age of comparative power and economic potential, women are robbed of stature, liberty and function by increasing industrialisation. Batchelor’s article is similar to such a narrative, positing a decline in female influence, the increasing confinement of women within a domestic sphere, and a feminisation of the male which deprives women of any role. Does Porter’s novel need to be read as part of such a narrative or can it be placed differently? Contemporary literary tropes, historical evidence and Porter’s treatment of the sublime indicate it can.

Regarding the first of these, it has been seen that Porter’s female characters have a distinct political resonance. For example, Batchelor is certainly right in suggesting that Joanna is a warning to women to be self-sacrificing and sexually undemanding. However, as has been seen here, Joanna also shows the inefficacy of the kind of beauty Wollstonecraft believed Burke promoted. If Joanna represents a warning to women, she also demonstrates what constitutes bad behaviour for statesmen. Female characters gain a significance which allows the proper writer to

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<sup>293</sup> See Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 383 – 414.

discuss political matters, and which carries on a political debate in the aesthetic terms used by Wollstonecraft and Burke.

Historical evidence also brings into question the notion of strictly separated spheres in *The Scottish Chiefs*. Parallels for Helen's role can be found in the activity of real women in a struggle for national (in this case British) identity. During the Napoleonic Wars women played a significant supporting role. Not only were they, in the most obvious way, responsible for the birth and upbringing of soldiers, but, as Colley notes, as soon as war broke out in 1793, "groups of prosperous women banded together in all parts of the country to provide warm clothing for British troops about to set sail for Flanders" (Colley 260). This contribution may seem too traditionally feminine to be particularly effective in gaining power for women, but it grants them a significant status as patriots, members of a national unit no longer confined to domestic interests alone.<sup>294</sup> Women also criticised the behaviour of males when it did not seem sufficiently protective and patriotic. For example, in 1798 after Leicestershire's militia were urged to volunteer for active service against the Irish uprising and only half agreed, the others were jeered at by women (Colley 257). With these historical parallels in mind, Helen's activity in sowing Wallace's hair into the Scottish banner can no longer be seen as a representation of "woman [. . .] disembodied in the public sphere of politics and national life [. . .] utter[ing], in a voiceless domestic act, only the words prescribed by the men's quest for authentic identity" (Batchelor 356). Instead, it becomes an aesthetic act with political ramifications, a step to granting women status as patriots as well as wives. The importance of Helen's patriotism is underlined in an episode where she discovers evidence of political intrigue and travels secretly through the night in order to inform her father, preventing disaster (*Chiefs* 2: 72 – 73). Unlike her Grecian namesake, Porter's Helen does not cause

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<sup>294</sup> Arguments against continuing the war proved less popular as the response to Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem" (1812) indicates. For an account of the hostile reaction of the Tory press and the nervousness of friends and liberals, see William MacCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, ed. *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* (London: U of Georgia P, 1994), 309 – 11.

war as a result of her beauty - her attractiveness stems from her willingness to defend her country.

Thirdly, Batchelor's suggestion that the feminisation of heroes such as Wallace is a threat to woman's authentic voice, does not allow for Porter's ongoing rewriting of Wollstonecraft. In the "Author's Introduction" to the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had observed:

from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennoble the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being [. . .] all those who view them with a philosophic eye must [. . .] wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine. (*Political Writings* 72).

Wollstonecraft's irony in associating "talents and virtues" with manliness is evident; the implication is that such virtues should be common to the whole of the race. Nevertheless, succeeding conservative writers were eager to emphasise that the talents and virtues which should be pursued are feminine.

Batchelor's description of Wallace as "a feminized character in so far as he relies absolutely on the dictates of his sentiments to validate his actions as morally necessary" therefore needs to be re-examined. Batchelor gives as an example of Wallace's feminisation his early decision to make his home a domestic "retreat" in which to ignore the invaders (Batchelor 356; Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 2). However, while Wallace's use of his sentiments as guide is standard, it should be noted that this particular decision is uncharacteristic. Later in the novel, the sentiments which drive Wallace's actions are not selfish but, it is implied, divinely inspired. Wallace identifies his will with God's – "God armeth the patriot's hand" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1:

50). Additionally, after his personal vengeance for Marion, his fight is solely for his country - no personal motives are important to him and he experiences no excessive drive for vengeance or blood lust. Such drives are displaced onto other figures, so that Wallace appears both brave and mild, bold and merciful. A virtuous warrior, Wallace in fact promotes as sublime the values which writers such as Elizabeth Hamilton had emphasised. As has been discussed, in *Letters on Education* Hamilton had described a certain model of heroism as counterfeit: "By introducing false associations of regard and preference with adventitious circumstances, altogether foreign to the moral character, as learning, strength, valour, power, & c. they [men] have destroyed the just criterion of human worth . . ." (Hamilton, *L. on E.* 240). The result is not only contempt for femininity but "contempt for those moral qualities which are allowed to constitute the perfection of the female character: meekness, gentleness, temperance, and chastity: that command over the passions which is obtained by frequent self-denial" (Hamilton, *L. on E.* 241). It has been seen how Hamilton's version of the standard of taste seeks to replace these qualities at the centre of human nature. Reversing Wollstonecraft's rhetoric, qualities considered feminine, rather than manly, form the basis of desirable behaviour. Similarly, the qualities which make Wallace exceptional and beyond reproach are, paradoxically, considering his warrior status, precisely his "meekness, gentleness, temperance, and chastity."

Read in the context of an attempt to re-evaluate "feminine" virtues, Wallace's heroism does not seem like the "fall" of an authentic woman's voice. Rather, it represents the association of the sublime with Christian qualities frequently considered feminine. This does not, for Porter, mean that women themselves are rendered voiceless. Indeed, the feminine is all-pervasive in this novel about war, from the adolescent Ferdinand's tender hero-worship of Wallace, to the personification of Scotland as a woman.<sup>295</sup> This feminine Scotland, however, is said

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<sup>295</sup>This latter, it is true, seems on first sight commonplace, a variation on the way: "Woman, as the centre of that individually available national emblem, becomes at once empowering of

by its heroes to have a landscape so mountainous that it is made for liberty. Helen remarks:

God's gift of freedom is stamp'd upon [our country]. Our mountains are his seal. Plains are the proper territories of tyranny: there the armies of an usurper may extend themselves with ease; leaving no corner unoccupied in which patriotism might shelter or treason hide. But mountains, glens, morasses, lakes, set bounds to conquest; and amidst these, stands the impregnable seat of liberty. (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: 70)

The heights mentioned by Helen are sublime in their representation of the will to freedom; on the other hand, they are seen as mountainous but enclosed spaces - each mountain offers a cave, hermit's dwelling, or a shelter behind a sublime and falling torrent. Scotland's sublimity and its offer of freedom rely on a paradoxical enclosure within its untamed spaces. This is more than an acknowledgement that the beautiful and the sublime, the strong and the weak, are interdependent.<sup>296</sup> It is the very identification of the sublime and the enclosed hiding place that makes liberty possible.

Porter's Christian hero, Wallace, is sublime yet has qualities associated with the feminine. However, this may be read as a part of Porter's redefinition of the sublime and the beautiful. Porter combined Wollstonecraft's critique of the celebrated beauty with the imagery of female cross-dressing, to attack not only radical feminists, but the duplicitous behaviour Wollstonecraft had connected with

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others - she inspires the political and military proofs of manhood" and is "the site of national vulnerability" (Batchelor 356). This association of woman and nation in *The Scottish Chiefs* is also noted by Ian Dennis, *"What a Land is This, where All the Women are Fair, and the Men Brave!": The Historical Novel, Nationalism and Desire*, diss, University of Toronto, 1995. At times "Woman," in the form of Helen, and Scotland and are indeed intimately linked, as Ian Dennis shows. Dennis describes the parallel between the rape of Scotland by the English and Helen's attempted rape by Soulis (in which it is at times ambiguous whether she has been penetrated), noting: "But if a violated, yet still-to-be-rescued woman is a literary property that Jane Porter cannot quite risk, the same is not true for the violated but ever-virginal Scotland" (32).

<sup>296</sup>See Runge, esp. 168 - 210. In the last chapter, she focuses on "beauty as the dialectic double of sublimity, where the beautiful provides the conditions of possibility for the sublime" (Runge 174).

Burke. Porter's work also demonstrates, however, that the imagery of female cross-dressing and of female beauty could be presented in such a way as to make female participation in the state acceptable. Although labelled by Batchelor as part of a fall in the feminine voice, Porter, like Hamilton, rewrites Wollstonecraft's remarks in order to associate desirable human and political virtues with the feminine rather than the manly. To facilitate this process, Porter creates a feminised sublime. As will be shown, Porter is able to connect this unoppressive, patriotic sublime, with enclosure, even with domesticity. In doing so, she makes the traditionally feminine realm of the hearth a supremely patriotic place for men and women.

### iii. The Enclosed Sublime

little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon [the Queen of France] in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.<sup>297</sup>

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* Burke allies beauty and weakness, as he had in *The Enquiry*, but this time he uses it to generate pity, dwelling on the spectacle of Marie Antoinette, who, despite her "sex, [. . .] beauty, and [. . .] amiable qualities," flies "almost naked" from her persecutors (*Reflections* 168). While the passive fortitude of the Queen in prison, like a "Roman matron," offers a more dignified view of queenship, Burke's dramatic rendering of the Queen's flight provides a more enduring account of the role of women in the state



(*Reflections* 169). In this version they are vulnerable, sexual objects, there to be defended as a result of gallantry, rather than because of the duties of Christianity. Burke's image of female sexual vulnerability, indeed his use of *The Enquiry's* aesthetics in *Reflections*, was swiftly challenged. Throughout the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft turned the terms of his aesthetic theory against him.<sup>298</sup> She connects his description of the sublime with respect for power rather than for virtue. For Wollstonecraft, Burke's aesthetic thought as applied in the *Reflections* in fact embodies the very tyrant/slave morality she views with suspicion. Such thought, in her opinion, has grave consequences for the nation. When hereditary power and property seem more sublime than virtue:

Security of property! Behold, in a few words, the definition of English liberty. And to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed. - The Briton takes the place of the man, and the image of God is lost in the citizen! But it is not that enthusiastic flame which in Greece and Rome consumed every sordid passion: no, self is the focus; and the disparting [sic] rays rise not above our foggy atmosphere. (*Political Writings* 13)

According to Wollstonecraft, a sublime of virtuous generalities, as represented by "God" and "man" is displaced. Even the disinterestedness of a citizen is gone. Only greed and private interest remain. Wollstonecraft's picture is a rather problematic one for the identity of a commercial nation such as Britain. She provides two favourable interpretations of the sublime, neither of which are available for the patriotic story of late eighteenth-century Britain. The sublime which she links to the civic humanism of Greece and Rome relies upon a body politic which is

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<sup>297</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* (1790), ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 169 - 70; subsequently *Reflections*.

<sup>298</sup> Wollstonecraft's challenges to Burke's rhetoric are also discussed by Wendy Gunther-Canada, "The Politics of Sense and Sensibility: Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay Graham on Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 126 - 47; subsequently Gunther-Canada. Gunther-Canada's focus is Wollstonecraft's attack on sentiment; see particularly 132 - 35. See also Furniss 191.

disinterested and hence extremely difficult for a nation of shopkeepers to assume. On the other hand, her moral sublime of God and man is supranational, unavailable for the patriotic story. Thus Wollstonecraft's versions of the sublime are difficult to employ in the patriotic propaganda of a trading nation, while she has made their powerful Burkean cousin look even more dubious than before. Both the sublime and the beautiful needed considerable reworking before they could be employed for propaganda purposes in a national tale. This section demonstrates that Jane Porter was able to provide such a reworking by challenging the gender affiliations of the sublime and the beautiful.

The sexual characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful have seemed clear to commentators from de Quincey onwards.<sup>299</sup> Critics such as Runge and Ferguson have complicated this picture, and writers on Wollstonecraft and others have shown how the gender associations have been disturbed, but the basic affiliations have remained, broadly speaking, undisputed.<sup>300</sup> Porter represents a challenge to such critical opinion because she refuses the masculine/feminine dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful. Instead, she detaches them from their gender associations and exploits them for a patriotic narrative. The striking effect of this can be seen in Porter's landscapes which are therefore quite different from the images of Britain included in the writings of two other participants in the "war of ideas," Jane Austen and Jane West.<sup>301</sup> Both West and Austen minimised the impact

<sup>299</sup>In "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature" Thomas de Quincey wrote, "the *Sublime by way of polar antithesis to the Beautiful* [. . .] grew up on the basis of *sexual* distinctions, – the Sublime corresponding to the male, and the Beautiful, its antipole, corresponding to the female"; see Thomas de Quincey, *The Collected Writings of Thomas de Quincey*, ed. David Masson, vol. 10 (London: Black, 1897) 289 – 341; quoted from 300; see the introduction for a fuller discussion of the critical history of the sublime and the beautiful.

<sup>300</sup>For Runge's discussion on the inter-reliance of the sublime and the beautiful see previous note; see also Frances Ferguson, "Legislating the Sublime," Cohen 128 – 147, subsequently "Legislating," for a discussion of the sublime and the beautiful's relation to social order and improvement in Burke and Kant; for Wollstonecraft's challenge to Burke's gendered rhetoric (particularly considered in terms of sensibility) see Gunther-Canada 126 – 47. Some of the most influential studies of the twentieth century have scarcely considered the beautiful at all and in such cases the gender dynamics of the sublime and the beautiful remains inexplicit; see Monk and also Marjorie H. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959; New York: Norton, 1963).

<sup>301</sup>In the 1790s West participated in the debate through her three novels, *The Advantages of Education; Or, the History of Maria Williams* (1793); *A Gossip's Story* (1796); and *A Tale of the Times* (1799); as Claudia Johnson points out, "Jane West was the most distinguished to

of sublimity on the British subject. Porter, on the other hand, saw her (gender neutral) sublime as integral to her patriotism. However, while in the distant past of *The Scottish Chiefs* such a sublime of patriotism was easily invoked, the effect is harder to achieve when describing later eras of British history. How is Porter to transform “Briton[s]” going about the everyday actions of their lives into patriots?

In *The Pastor's Fireside* Porter began by disconnecting the beautiful from femininity, and the sublime from masculinity in order to give the language of aesthetics purely patriotic connotations. The novel associates the sublime and the beautiful with Cornelia (and eventually Wharton), and Alice and Ferdinand respectively. Cornelia's beauties are described as “lofty,” the “majestic contour of her features suited well with her Roman name” (Porter, *Pastor* 1: 7). Alice's “charms, if of a feebleness, were of a subtler force” (Porter, *Pastor* 1: 8). Furthermore, the sisters' actions also reflect their links to sublimity and beauty. When, for example, Alice, Cornelia and Ferdinand see Louis riding through the rapidly rising tide to reach Lindesfarne, Alice comments: “Ah, those daring expeditions suit your taste, Cornelia! [. . .] You, like Louis, love to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm!” (Porter, *Pastor* 1: 58). Alice, on the other hand, becomes involved in a secret engagement with the Spaniard, Ferdinand, and finds herself ill as a result of the deceit she has to practice, exhibiting both physical and moral fragility.

The character of the girls' lovers likewise reflect their respective styles of beauty. Ferdinand, Alice's lover, makes a number of selfish and unwise decisions throughout the novel: he is attracted to an unscrupulous and fortune-hunting woman; he involves Alice in a secret engagement; and he is willing to see his sister sacrifice herself by becoming a nun if it will mean that he can marry Alice. Private

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dramatize Burkean fictions with little adulteration” (*Jane Austen* 6). Jane Austen's more subtle involvement with the debate has been heavily documented, and, like West and Porter, she afterward employed its rhetoric in a construction of British identity. See the discussion of Hamilton's critical association with Austen in the introduction to the previous chapter for Butler, Johnson and Kelly; see also Warren Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979); Edward Neill, *The Politics of Jane Austen* (Houndmills, Eng.: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1999); Janet Todd, “Jane Austen, Politics and Sensibility,” in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Sellers, Linda Hutcheon and Paul Perron (Toronto, ON: U of Toronto P, 1991) 71-87.

interests characterise the couple. Cornelia, on the other hand, falls in love with the charming Jacobite, Duke Wharton (as he is often referred to). Loved by Louis, Wharton is nonetheless suspected for much of the novel for his actions against Louis' father, the statesman, Ripperda. The Duke is vindicated, however, because he is finally proven to have separated his personal feelings for Ripperda and his patriotic emotions and actions.

The two couples are used by Porter to demonstrate both men and women are capable of having sublime and beautiful characteristics. The beautiful is associated with a selfish concentration on one's own private affairs. The sublime, on the other hand, involves a feeling of duty to a national or to a Christian cause. Furthermore, the sublime of patriotism is viable even in peacetime. On the accession of George II to the throne, for example, Wharton is given a pardon and concedes that since the new king combines birthright and talent, the Stuart cause is all but defunct. His patriotic duty under such circumstances would become to live quietly in England as a private citizen, though, even less threateningly, he dies abroad.<sup>302</sup>

Porter emphasises a Christian and domestic vision of patriotism, an enclosed sublime of liberty, of which Britain is at the heart. This is confirmed by the topography of the novel, which repeatedly associates Britain with an enclosed, often domestic, and certainly religious space. The novel begins with the arrival of Ferdinand and his father at the titular pastor's fireside on the island of Lindesfarne. Taken in from the stormy night, they find hospitality on an island formerly home to

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<sup>302</sup>The mysterious, half-explained Jacobite plots which have threatened Louis and Ripperda for most of the novel now seem insignificant. After Ripperda's fall from the position of Prime Minister and death, it is Wharton's personal responsibilities rather than the political consequences of international intrigue which are important. The threat of Jacobitism and international instability melt away. This is reminiscent of the end of *Redgauntlet*, though it does not have the tremendous anti-climax of Scott's novel, in which the Stuart claimant to the throne himself is perceived as so little threat he is allowed to leave the country. There is, however, a similar sense of defusion, which Porter has achieved by displacing the fear of rebellion onto Ripperda. Ripperda's personal pride leads him to return to his ancestors, the Moors, converting to Islam, and fighting against Spain. His 'gothic' adherence to inheritance is thus associated with unpatriotic arrogance. By comparison, the Jacobite plots seem less significant.

St Cuthbert.<sup>303</sup> Lindesfarne, a microcosm of an ideal Britain, here contains not only the Christian but also the familial. As an island, it functions as a metaphor for a possible Britain. The sea around it in fact acts in the same way as the mountains around the glens of Scotland do in *The Scottish Chiefs* - enclosing, empowering and sublime.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, at the end of the novel, when the Jacobite threat recedes, the sea provides protection for the whole of Britain rather than for Lindesfarne. The novel's hero, Louis, settles on a mainland Britain to enjoy a domestic life as safe and as spiritual as on the island. Britain now represents a secluded other where the plotting of the European courts which has occupied much of the novel can be forgotten.

In both the case of the mountains of Scotland and the island surrounded by sea Porter has managed to combine the sublime and the enclosed. Both the sea around Lindesfarne and the mountains of Scotland are sublime objects linked with heroism. The sublimity of the sea is established as Louis, watched by Alice and Cornelia, rides through the waves in order to claim protection from Jacobite plotting. Similarly, as has been seen, the people of Scotland envisage their mountainous country as a sign that Scotland is meant to be free. At the same time, however, it is not just the sea or the mountains which are sublime, but the islands and the glens as well since they are the space in which liberty is possible. Reversing Hazlitt's connection of tyranny and sublimity, Porter finds liberty sublime and thus implicitly argues that even the tamer, domestic aspects of the British landscape and people are sublime. In other words, Porter insists that the patriotic sublime functions for Britain even if Britain is perceived as an enclosed space where the inhabitants live in peaceful routine.

However, it is really primarily on the level of symbol that Porter successfully combines sublime patriotism and enclosure. Images of containment in her work

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<sup>303</sup>Linda Colley's study *Britons* makes a lengthy argument that the formation of British identity was based on Protestantism.

<sup>304</sup>Without the religious emphasis, Anna Letitia Barbauld in her poem "Corsica" (written in 1769, published in 1792) had connected an embattled island with liberty in order to exhort the British to "heroic ardour" (Barbauld, *The Poems* 21, poem 9, 16).

resonate interestingly. For example, she suggests that political life itself can involve an enclosure more constructing and morally dubious than a domestic environment. In *The Pastor's Fireside*, as in *Thaddeus of Warsaw* there is a divide between the arena of international politics and the domestic, but images of enclosure are connected with each. Louis, eager to demonstrate his heroism, is shocked to find his first patriotic contribution is to sit in a small room copying mysterious papers for an incomprehensible reason (1: 130 – 47). Surrounded by doubt and ignorance on all sides, Louis learns to appreciate the clearer moral choices of domestic enclosure more than the obscurity of state affairs. The sublime of patriotism is best exhibited by following daily moral duties, which, when political, will be shrouded in a mystery which has the obscurity of the sublime but, often, little of its glamour. Louis's political enclosure and his international adventure are both framed by scenes at the domestic and Christian hearth of the title. Though the effective marginalisation of this hearth in the plot indicates Porter's difficulty, Porter attempts to connect the national narrative with the domestic.

She and her sister were to repeat this with *Tales Round a Winter Hearth* (1826), a collaborative work of four short stories. Here Porter's main suggestions of patriotic British sublimity work through the genre she uses and the way the tales are structured. The first three tales are grouped to suggest the diversity of traditions and identities within the British Isles, rather as certain stories in *The Canterbury Tales* had done. However, the Porter sisters' greater concentration on British society is indicated by the fact that, whereas the Lees' tales range throughout Europe and are told by international travellers, the Porters' speakers are detained friends. This suggests that it is a notion of national community rather than international comparison which concerns the Porter sisters. The first story, "Glenrowan, A Scottish Tradition" deals with a Jacobite rebellion, the second, "Lord Howth, an Irish Legend," is a more supernatural tale, the third, "A Tale of Our Own Times" is a domestic story of financial hardship amongst farmers, where

war leads to separation and to financial hardship for the women left behind.

However, the fourth story, written by Jane Porter, suggests all three narratives have a common heritage. It indicates that the differences of region and class which appear in the first three stories (but which, in any case, never appeared particularly threatening) are nullified because of the shared sublime of Christian virtue. In the 1840 recollective preface Porter herself remarks that the tale, inspired by Sir Robert Ker's travels, was particularly significant to her because of its references to Christianity: "I followed my brother's track in his Eastern travels, borrowing from his pilgrimage to ancient Babylon [ . . . ] I own it is the story most interesting to me that I ever wrote, for it took me to Mount Olivet and to Jerusalem, along with my young heroine" (1840 *Chiefs* 41).

The story is complex enough to require summary. It begins with a short narrative at the end of the first volume, detailing the discovery of a manuscript, after which the second volume describes "The Pilgrimage of Berenice, A Record Of Burnham Abbey." Berenice is shut up in a convent by her mysterious father, who, it is eventually discovered, is Eustace de Bouillon, brother to the first king of Jerusalem, Baldwin. On the latter's death, Eustace finds the throne bequeathed away from him. As Ripperda had done when thwarted in ambition, Eustace joins the other side, uniting with the Caliph of Baghdad and offering him Berenice as a reward for his support. On the journey across the desert, however, Eustace is attacked and killed by a lion. The Count, who had been about to rescue Berenice, falls in love with her and takes her back to his lands in England, where Berenice founds the religious order of the title. The emphasis on Christian versus Islamic values and on west versus east in this tale contrast with the folk tales and narratives of political strife within Britain which form the first volume. Britain is made to appear more homogeneous (and therefore more unified) beside an alien and exotic other.

Porter is of course not the only writer to emphasise the need for western unity (against an Eastern threat) during this period – Sophia Lee's *Almeyda, Queen*

of *Granada. A Tragedy. In Five Acts* (1796) uses a similar technique, for example. However, in Porter's tale the reference to Berenice's return to England emphasises that she is far more interested in British identity. The distinctive elements of Porter's use of Christianity for the national romance can in fact be demonstrated by comparing it with a tale written by Harriet Lee. "The Old House of Hontercombe, or Berenice's Pilgrimage" rewrites Lee's "Old Woman's Tale" or "Lothaire" from *The Canterbury Tales*. As part of a larger project "Lothaire" was, as has been seen, set in a politicised context. The Lees had made a connection between humble, domestic folk culture and political conflict which Porter repeated in *Tales Round A Winter Hearth*. However, in Harriet Lee's tale Christianity (and more specifically Catholicism) is connected with materialism, while the status of the romance story which gives the origin of the monastery's material wealth is dubious. In contrast, in Porter's tale no doubt is cast on Berenice or her founding of a religious order. The manuscript telling the tale, like Radcliffe's naturalised ruins, indicates the stabilising force of tradition and time on national identity.

Porter's project is focused on the connection between sublimity, patriotism and the domestic. Her innovations become particularly startling when she is compared with West. West also emphasises the importance of the domestic to the political but, both in terms of the landscape chosen and her picture of female activity, she is reluctant to introduce the sublime. In this respect her attitude is influenced by Burke's. Frances Ferguson comments that "whereas Burke in 1757 almost always points beyond the individual being overcome by the sublime and toward the reassertion of individual autonomy, in the *Reflections* it would appear that individuality has been permanently sacrificed to the sublimity of the mob" ("Legislating" 136). West adopts a correspondingly cautious view of the sublime and its tendency to overwhelm the individual. Instead of a sublime landscape, West depicts a sheltered, orderly nation where the most significant dilemmas are the moral ones which occur in the environment of the village.



In addition, West avoids associating the tale form with the sublime or, as the Lees and Porter had done, with political unrest. In the title to *A Gossip's Story*, for instance, West invokes another low status literary form but, unlike the Lees with their Shakespearean epigraph, she leaves it unglorified by a sense of British tradition and shorn of the association with national strife. The unglamorous gossip is not so much connected with national romance as with a more prosaic community bond. In the introduction to *The Refusal* (1810) her role is compared that of a politician. Though the gossip does not sacrifice "health, peace, and reputation to legislative duties," the narrator asks, "do we not defy rheumatisms [. . .] by sallying forth in all sorts of weather to collect, or impart, intelligence, to inform the ignorant what their neighbours say of their conduct . . ."<sup>305</sup> While the moral lessons of *The Refusal* suggest that the role of the gossip is to be taken rather more seriously than the introduction suggests, this "neighbourhood of voluntary spies" offers little of the sublime (Austen, *Novels* 5: 198). The tale, the story and the village gossip have an indirectly political role to play but the emphasis is on calmness, reason and continuity, rather than upon a passionate exhortation to patriotism. The sublime, meanwhile, is entirely separate from domesticity.<sup>306</sup>

*Emma*, published the year after *The Pastor's Fireside*, may be seen as an evaluation of whether the enclosed space is a place where sublimity and patriotism are possible. It associates England with a metaphor of enclosure, the garden, which Porter was to use extensively in her next novel. Writing on the garden and the bower, Jacqueline Labbe notes in her study *Romantic Visualities; Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* that, "although used more often to enclose women, to

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<sup>305</sup>Jane West, *The Refusal*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810) 1: 24; for the implications of West's choice of a spinster as her representative see Susan Allen Ford, "Tales of the Times: Family and Nation in Charlotte Smith and Jane West," in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrerg, Elizabeth Mahn Nollen and Sheila Reitzel Foor, introd. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1997), 15 – 29, especially 19 and 28.

<sup>306</sup>For a contrasting view of the English village see Madame de Stael, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), trans and ed. Sylvia Raphael, introd. John Isbell (Oxford: World's Classics-Oxford UP, 1998). Corinne, the half-Italian heroine and genius, goes to live in a little Northumberland town, and becomes subject to moral indoctrination from Lady Edgermond, who, as her stepmother, is a narrow-minded Prudentia Homespun; see particularly 46.

render them properly domestic, properly encircled, properly 'genteel,' the garden can also open a less decorous space structurally designed to subvert, obstruct, or transgress gentility" (66). The garden, the safe place for the proper femininity of the conduct books, can also be a "subversively empowering space" (*Romantic Visualities* 67). In *Emma* the garden of England is, however, presented equivocally. On her second meeting with Emma Mrs Elton praises the ground at Hartfield as similar to those at Maple Grove. Emma replies:

"When you have seen more of this country, I am afraid you will think you have over-rated Hartfield. Surry is full of beauties."

"Oh! yes, I am quite aware of that. It is the garden of England, you know. Surry is the garden of England."

"Yes; but we must not rest our claims on that distinction. Many counties, I believe, are called the garden of England, as well as Surry."

"No, I fancy not," replied Mrs Elton, with a most satisfied smile. "I never heard any county but Surry called so." (Austen, *Novels* 4: 273 – 74)

Mrs Elton wants to claim for herself the status of the ideal woman of the conduct books, a woman who hardly wishes to "stir beyond the park paling" (Austen, *Novels* 4: 218). However, her defective knowledge of the language of the garden underlines her lack of the propriety she claims. Emma's comment, that many counties are called the garden of England, is, on the one hand, an attempt to set Mrs Elton right without direct contradiction. On the other, it extends the feminine realm of the garden over England, making the country a safe and feminised place.

In *Emma* Austen implies that a large number of the British population live in a space that is more comparable to a garden than a sublime height. Emma's trip to Box Hill demonstrates this (Austen, *Novels* 4: 367 – 76). It is an elevation within the territory Augusta would define as a garden. As such, it is reminiscent of the domestic settings of Hannah More, about whom Labbe observes: "More's concern

with 'proper stations' in her conduct books leads her to distinguish the place of men 'in the grand theatre of human life' very carefully from the cultivated woman's 'little elevation [in] her own garden' (in Daniels 439)" (*Romantic Visualities* 67).<sup>307</sup> Austen's domestic height is, however, employed rather differently. The eminence within a garden which Box Hill represents is a viewing point not just for women but for various different elements of the English middle classes. In this enclosed and domestic society, females and the genteel poor gain the elevation; on the other hand, the upper class privileged male, Knightley, is limited to this kind of height by the social circumstances of Britain. Box Hill is an ironic rewriting of the peaks of the romantic sublime. The awe-inspiring heights crossed by the traveller have been jokingly transformed into a hill visited by picnickers; the superior knowledge offered by the elevation is changed into social misunderstanding and ignorance; and the power which the prospect view symbolises is downsized to Emma's ill-mannered snub of Mrs Bates (Austen, *Novels* 4: 370 – 1). Even the relatively trivial English prospect view as represented by Box Hill has its problematic aspects. The garden is no longer merely a space for feminine self-expression. Instead, it is a symbol of English identity, but one which excludes the sublime.

Such images of social containment were persistent. The association of England and the enclosed, natural space are, for example, similarly found in Mrs West's much later novel, *Ringrove; Or, Old Fashioned Notions* (1827). The second part of the title again suggests the tendency to give this image of pastoral Britain a heritage and consequent, though colloquial, credibility.<sup>308</sup> In West's novel, however, the emphasis has been once more redirected. The garden is not so much a

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<sup>307</sup> Stephen Daniels, "Love and Death Across an English Garden: Constable's Paintings of his Family's Flower and Kitchen Gardens," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55 (1992): 433 – 57.

<sup>308</sup> See Peter Garside, "Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's *Waverley*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46 (1991): 30 – 53, especially 45; subsequently "Popular Fiction." Garside notes: "It was not uncommon for novelists early in the nineteenth century to place events, occasionally narrators, several years before the actual date of composition (among other things, this helped muffle the age of the novel itself, potentially advancing its 'shelf-life' " (Garside, "Popular Fiction" 36). West and Porter similarly wished

place which facilitates growth in political judgment as a place of security, where the social order is confirmed. The title combines two separate ideas of enclosure, the ring of marriage (a representative form of social bond) and a pastoral setting that naturalises such enclosure. In this novel, the moral heart of England is the country village, where a feminised morality governs - as the grandmother, the moral guide, says: "I would rather trust public morals ... to the propriety and decorum of women, than to the worldly foresight of men" (West, *Ringrove* 1: 107). West's portrayal of domesticity is, on the one hand, a conservative strategy, condemning women to a position of political quietude. On the other, it creates an image of an enduring Britain particularly expedient in the depression that followed the Napoleonic Wars.

Porter herself found it increasingly difficult to combine the sublime of patriotism and domesticity. Indeed, in her last novel, *The Field of Forty Footsteps*, her treatment of the garden suggests that she no longer wishes to combine the two on the level of landscape. The gardens of the novel are still as politically significant as those found in West or Austen but they are less sublime than the landscapes of Porter's earlier works. Betha, the heroine:

often strolled out into the leaf-strewn wildernesses of the manorhouse – for though the high trees were gone, much springing undergrowth remained – or took a more measured pace along its garden parterres, still full of those luxuriant vestiges of former horticultural magnificence which are the last clinging tenants of any soil where once such a garden has been. (Porter, *The Field of Forty Footsteps* 1: 120 - 21)

Its noblest trees cut down as a result of the alteration in government, the garden is a living signifier of political change. This is as explicit a connection between the garden and the political landscape as that Austen makes in *Emma* between the garden and national identity. However, Porter's use of a garden motif, rather than

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to suggest the age of their stories, but in a way which increased the value of their contents, embedding them in a supposed tradition.

the imagery of island or sea, is indicative of her tendency to move away from presenting a sublime of landscape as part of national identity. Instead, Porter's gardens in *The Field of Forty Footsteps*, though implicitly referring to the allegorical gardens of Commonwealth verse, at times seem to be dreamlike spaces for meditation. Betha, for example, discovers that reading with her republican companion, Mildred, is less than congenial:

In the latter occupation the dame's remarks generally took such an ascetic hue, pressing so rigidly on human characters, and so entirely would have disenchanted the poetic mind of every sweet illusion in the world of its imaginings – the garden, Betha thought, of the human soul, which yet bore witness of the paradise it had fallen from – that though her reverence and her affection were not impaired for her englooming monotony, her sense of discomfort in her society gradually lessened her desire to seek it . . . . (Porter, *The Field of Forty Footsteps* 1: 121)

Both the garden of the imagination and the physical garden are damaged by levelling commonwealth rhetoric and both are places that are peculiarly designed to make the heart "sensible to the consolations of nature's voice," to produce feelings of acceptance, mercy and forgiveness (Porter, *The Field of Forty Footsteps* 1: 120). Nature, though still political in its significance, now works to soothe rather than to stir. It prompts reflection rather than enthusiasm and, though Betha is still politically active, this change in symbolism represents a retreat from Porter's earlier insistence on the sublimity of patriotism in both war and peace.

However, that such a retreat became necessary is not surprising. A glance at Wollstonecraft's interpretation of Burke on the sublime suggests that the creation of such national sublimity was no easy task. A pessimistic interpretation of Wollstonecraft's remarks on Burke might have been that, given Burke's reliance on sublimity of property, a sublime of virtue was a virtual impossibility. Porter nevertheless rewrote the sublime so that it could be used in the context of the domestic and everyday. However, not only was the link between sublimity and

domesticity hard to maintain, but such an inspiring version of patriotism was potentially dangerous in the times of social unrest following the Napoleonic wars. Thus the emphasis in Porter's writing changed and she too came to rely on "old-fashioned notions," though in a rather different way to West. Her vision of patriotism was no longer so active. She depicted a British identity created through folk tradition.

#### iv. *The Field of Forty Footsteps*. Folk tradition and history painting

The use of folk tradition in Jane Porter's work has been misinterpreted, perhaps due to her association with Walter Scott. There has been long-standing critical contention over the suggestion that Jane Porter's work influenced *Waverley* (1814). Porter herself was keen to associate the type of novel she produced with Scott's work, writing in her 1831 edition of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* that Walter Scott "did me the honour to adopt the style or class of novel of which '*Thaddeus of Warsaw*' was the first" (*Thaddeus* SN 1: vi). A few years later *Fraser's Magazine* comments: "It is to her fame that she began the system of historical novel-writing, which attained the climax of renown in the hands of Sir Walter Scott; and no light praise it is that she has thus pioneered the way for the greatest exhibition of the greatest genius of our time," though "Peter Puff" in the *Aberdeen Magazine* had refuted the idea a few months after the novel's publication.<sup>309</sup> Modern commentators also join in the debate. Both Ann H. Jones in *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (1986) and A. D. Hook in "Jane Porter, Sir Walter Scott, and the Historical Novel" give the anecdote of Scott admitting later to George IV that *The Scottish Chiefs* was "the parent in his mind of the *Waverley*

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<sup>309</sup>"Miss Jane Porter," *Fraser's Magazine* 11 (April 1835): 404; see also Peter Puff, "Letters to Certain Persons. Epistle I. To Miss Jane Porter," *The Aberdeen Magazine* (Oct. 1831): 552 - 57.

novels,” as Peter Garside notes when he explores the possibility of an earlier date of composition for *Waverley*.<sup>310</sup>

However, the association of Porter’s work with Sir Walter Scott’s has not operated in her favour. Rather, it has meant that her work has been judged by criteria more applicable to Scott than to Porter. A. D. Hook, for example, praises Scott’s ability to distinguish the past from the present. He cites Lukács’s theory that a new sense of historical change was generated by the French Revolution, and adds that, whether for this reason or because of the alteration in “Scotland from a condition of bitter, internecine conflict [ . . . ] Scott was possessed by a sharp historical sense, a powerful sense of history as movement, as the matrix of change bringing the past into meaningful relationship with the present” (190). This standard becomes a ground for criticising Porter: “It is of precisely such a sense of history that Jane Porter is entirely innocent,” Hook decides (190). In fact, as this section aims to show, Porter wished to produce a sense of continuity with an (imaginary) heroic past, rather than to distinguish it from the present. This becomes clear when Porter’s work is examined in terms of the theories of history painting which influenced her. In addition, Porter’s conception of history can be better understood by examining her use of Jacobitism and by comparing her thought with that of a key player in the French Revolutionary debate, Edmund Burke.

Porter’s links with historical painting have not been overlooked. A. D. Hook argues: “The aim of the society was the cultivation of topographical and historical painting. Jane Porter may well have been encouraged to do in words what her brother and his friends were doing so successfully in paint” (182). However, he does not explore how this may be used to explain the different approach to history which he suggests that Porter possesses. Porter’s focus on patriotism in peacetime,

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<sup>310</sup> However, because of the assumption that work on *Waverley* was begun in 1805, both critics minimise Porter’s influence. Peter Garside explores an alternative process of composition for *Waverley* to that Scott gave in his “General Preface” to the Magnum Opus edition of the *Waverley* novels (*Waverley Novels* 1: xx – xxv). That account suggests seven chapters written in 1805 were abandoned to be rediscovered, with the novel being completed in 1814. Garside advances various evidence to suggest an engagement with *Waverley* in

the customary and even the tactical deployment of history, can be linked with the political theory which Barrell finds in eighteenth-century discussions of history painting. Porter's brother, Sir Robert Ker Porter, who eventually served as historical painter to Alexander I of Russia, trained in London at the Royal Academy from around 1790 or 1791 when the President was Benjamin West. Robert, and consequently Jane, would have been exposed to the political rhetoric which much art theory contained. By 1794 the Porters had moved to London to be with Robert who, according to S.C. Hall, was studying at the Royal Academy in 1790 (145). He would have been only thirteen. Mona Wilson remarks of a few years later:

The society of young painters established by Francia and Girtin in 1799 used to meet in Robert's studio at 16 Great Newport Street, Leicester Square [ . . . ] The object of the "Brothers" was to inaugurate a school of historic landscape, and on each occasion a poetic subject was chosen for competitive sketches. Jane Porter was sometimes present and invited to select the themes, and there she met John Sell Cotman, whose experiences [as a poor artist arriving in London] she appropriated for her *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. (120)

History painting was, according to eighteenth-century art theorists, the highest genre of painting because it demonstrated public virtue.<sup>311</sup> Porter's new subgenre of novel differed from earlier historical fictions in precisely the explicitness and persistence with which it aimed to encourage these national virtues in both men and women.

Porter's interest in public virtue and its link to history painting can be traced in *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. The novel shares with the history painting of West and others an interest in the ethic of aristocratic service which was expressed through a new emphasis on uniform. The ethic of aristocratic service gained ground during

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1810. This would have allowed *The Scottish Chiefs* to be a more substantial influence on Scott.

<sup>311</sup>See, for example, Reynolds, *Discourses*, particularly the fourth discourse, where he compares the various schools of painting (57 – 73). Painting that is concerned with "heroick



the Napoleonic Wars. In particular, the conflict caused a re-examination of the effects of mass participation in national life and some re-evaluation of the role of the landed aristocratic elite in the state. The nobility, Colley suggests, began to stress that their function was to serve the public and protect the country (178). This had been shown, for instance, by the interest in uniform shown after the War of American Independence, uniforms which “served to distinguish members of the British élite from the rest of the population, while at the same time underlining their wearers’ patriotic function” (Colley 186). This interest was reflected in history painting. Benjamin West, who became President of the Royal Academy in 1792, following Sir Joshua Reynolds, introduced the startling innovation of dressing his characters in contemporary uniforms in one of his most famous paintings, “The Death of General Wolfe” (1771).<sup>312</sup> This public service function is reflected in *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Not only is Thaddeus’s uniform and star insignia an important symbol in the novel, but his behaviour in wartime shows how a member of the elite serves his country through heroism, while the second half of the novel, set in England, suggests what kind of virtues should be displayed by the gentry in peacetime.

Another piece of evidence illustrating Porter’s links with the Royal Academy and with the thought of its history painters is an unpublished letter sent in February 1809 from Jane Porter to Mrs Flaxman. In it she comments on the pleasure of hearing that Mr Flaxman had been elected a member of the Academy – “We are happy to find that its [the Academy’s] Members possess the discernment [sic], and sufficient of the old spirit of the Grecian artists, to give that little to one whom posterity will remember, as unrivalled in taste and genius.”<sup>313</sup> Porter’s reference to the “old spirit of the Grecian artists” indicates her involvement in the discourse of civic humanism practised by the artists of the Academy and her

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action” and stirs “publick sympathy” is desirable because it encourages a departure from the particular (57).

<sup>312</sup> Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe* (1771), National Gallery, Ottawa.

<sup>313</sup> Jane Porter. Letter to Mrs Flaxman, February 1809, British Museum Additional Manuscripts 39, 781, f 423, Department of Manuscripts. British Library, London.

familiarity with the link between the arts and patriotism. That Flaxman, in particular, thought that the “old spirit” would be found in modern Britain is indicated by his comments in his introduction to his first lecture on sculpture. He points out that a professor in sculpture was not required “until the increasing taste of the country had given great popularity to the art itself, and native achievements had called on the powers of native Sculpture to celebrate British Heroes and Patriots.”<sup>314</sup>

The parallel between Porter’s writing and Academy notions of the role of art may be made a little more complex. Throughout the eighteenth century and particularly after the founding of the Royal Academy artists wished to assert the importance of painting to the state. Reynolds, for example, made great attempts to distance painting from the mechanical or servile and from the knowledge of the particular that was supposed to prevent public and political vision. Reynolds’s project of establishing the relevance of painting to the publicly minded citizen was, however, made more problematical by the increasingly specialisation of late eighteenth-century society. In *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* Barrell argues: “Reynolds’s early discourses should be read as an attempt, not just to reassert the civic function of history painting as it had traditionally been defined by humanist criticism, but also to redescribe that function for a society which seemed to afford, and a public which enjoyed, less scope for the exercise of the public virtues which history-painting was expected to encourage” (163). One of the ways Reynolds tried to cope with this was in moving “towards a notion that the arts might best be directed to the creation of a national community, rather than a civic republic of taste” (*Political Theory of Painting* 163).

In *The Scottish Chiefs*, Porter is also interested in a “national community.” Porter posits a convention of patriotism, a “spirit of wholesome knowledge,” in which the ordinary people in particular have access to “songs and tales expressing

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<sup>314</sup>John Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture*, John Flaxman, Esq. R.A., Professor of Sculpture in the Royal Academy of Great Britain: As Delivered by Him before the President and

the glory of the Scottish heritage” (*Chiefs* 1: viii). Their traditional knowledge becomes as important as the more empirically based knowledge of the readers of history books. The relationship between “apparent” and “real” truth is complicated, because the former may after all carry the weight of public virtue, rather than being mere backward-looking superstition. Porter’s Christian faith and her view of the political arena as potentially non-secular enabled her to imagine customs as both patriotic and Christian in a way Reynolds did not.

In this, she resembles James Barry, who joined the Academy in 1773 and was professor there from 1782 to his expulsion in 1799. As Barrell puts it, Barry thought:

if the ‘mechanical’ and the ‘servile’ wish to realise that potential  
[as ... citizens of the republic of taste], they need no lengthy re-  
education in the principles of abstraction; they have only to consult  
the doctrines of the Christian religion, and their consciences,  
instead of their interest, and they will find themselves  
enfranchised. (*Political Theory of Painting* 165)

Porter’s patriotic Scottish harpists similarly rely upon Christianity and their consciences and it is significant for Porter’s vision that they display more taste and intelligence than the servants of the late eighteenth century gothic novel. Their taste suggests that they may play a role in the national drama, even if it is only the role of providing supporting propaganda. There is no suggestion that any other type of enfranchisement is appropriate, though, with the liberty that using plot rather than polemic allows, Porter implies their greater degree of involvement in national life by having Wallace disguise himself as a harper.<sup>315</sup>

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*Members of the Royal Academy. With a Brief Memoir of the Author* (London: Murray, 1829).

<sup>315</sup> A striking difference between Barry and Porter is that Barry had “no interest in such notions as ‘the genius’ of the English people, as he has no truck with the idea that art might seek to create a national community of taste” (Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting* 166). National character could be described as it was at one moment, but it was continually changing. Porter’s use of tradition, on the other hand, encourages a belief in a certain stability of national character.

Porter's conservatism is evident in her *Aphorisms of Sir Phillip Sidney* (1807) when she significantly uses a painting metaphor to discuss social structure.<sup>316</sup> Earlier in the book she acknowledges that “men of eminent worth rise from the humbler orders and by the cause of things, take that honourable station in society, which the profligate have deserted” (Porter, *Aphorisms* 1: 4). She also remarks that to be as noble and happy as possible we should be “sovereigns of ourselves” but she still emphasises the importance of custom (Porter, *Aphorisms* 1: 29). Talking about “directors of the noble mind,” presumably referring to philosophers such as Godwin, she writes:

they descant upon the innate worthiness and inherent rights of all men, till the privilege of eccentricity is extended to all minds, ignoble as well as noble [. . .] The general sameness of manners gives them the spleen [. . .] This talisman of custom, this sameness, which they complain of, maintains the harmony of the civilized world; holds the dunces and the knaves, (to borrow a term of painting,) in some degree of keeping, and the real genius, which starts out of the canvass by its own strength, stands off with greater effect and brilliancy, from the deep shadow that involves the mass. Thus, as Providence has ordered it, the world presents a beautiful picture; in which every object wears its proportioned consequence. While the plan of our orators, if adopted, would shew only a toyman's warehouse; where every figure, good or bad, tumble over each other in endless confusion. (Porter, *Aphorisms* 1: 220 - 22)

Custom, which broadened taste for Reynolds, here provides Porter with “keeping,” with the perspective which provides a guide to social importance. “Custom” is thus a stabilising and conservative force for Porter, yet it is vaguer than resting the social order on inherited property, and is therefore more flexible. However, this

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<sup>316</sup>Jane Porter, *Aphorisms of Sir Philip Sidney: With Remarks*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807); subsequently *Aphorisms*.

flexibility inevitably makes it dangerous. As Reynolds worries about customs becoming “fantastical” as they become localised, Porter too comes to worry about local prejudices, as in *The Field of Forty Footsteps*. There, the heroine is educated initially in an environment where the commonwealth is celebrated, only to discover the differing prejudices of the royalists. Some other kind of historical perspective is necessary, and Porter attempts to give this in the introduction to her novel.

In her introduction to *The Field of Forty Footsteps* Porter emphasises history as tradition in a way which Hook’s criteria for a historical novel would make inappropriate. However, Porter’s appeal to tradition need not be dismissed so quickly. In fact, it can be seen as an adaptation of the notion of the public sphere that was evident in the nationally conscious peasants and harpists of *The Scottish Chiefs*. This development can be seen as a response to changes in the conception of the influence of written material upon political life. As James Chandler notes in the context of the Six Acts, in 1819 there was “evidence of a widespread consensus about the power of public letters [ . . . ] The eighteenth-century public sphere, one might say, had come of age.”<sup>317</sup> Jane Porter’s treatment of such public utterances shows the desire to present them as a source of national stability. Paradoxically, in order to do this she explored a Jacobite version of history, developing the emphasis upon the cyclical vision of the past frequently employed in Jacobite propaganda.

During the course of their careers, Porter and her sister, Anna Maria, showed an increasing interest in Jacobitism. Jane Porter’s most famous novel *The Scottish Chiefs* portrayed the battle for Scottish independence which would have been likely to stir associations with Jacobitism in the novel’s original readers. In Jane and Anna Maria’s collaborative project of four short stories, *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, the first story, “Glenrowan, A Scottish Tradition” deals with events surrounding a Jacobite rebellion. Though this story is by Jane’s sister, its similarities to *Thaddeus of Warsaw* suggest the extent of Jane’s influence and her

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<sup>317</sup>James Chandler, *England in 1819; The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1998), 43; subsequently Chandler.

interest in this area of history. Watson has noted that in *Thaddeus of Warsaw* the sentimental plot is superseded “in favour of national romance” and the same is true of “Glenrowan” where the heroine participates in a patriotic plot and only through this meets the man she is to marry (Watson 118 - 9). Apparently sentimental signs must be read patriotically.<sup>318</sup> In 1831 Jane Porter wrote the “Retrospective Introduction” to *The Scottish Chiefs*, in which, as has been mentioned, she recalls as a child seeing the widows of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion in Edinburgh. She also alleges that she met Jeannie Cameron, mistress of Charles Edward Stuart who supposedly played a significant part in the rebellion by leading her kinsmen into battle at Prestonpans, Falkirk and Culloden.

In this introduction’s mention of Jacobitism and its combined emphasis on source material A. D. Hook sees the influence of Sir Walter Scott: “In all these accounts Scott seems to be directing Jane Porter’s pen. After all if the Wizard had followed the trail she had pioneered, might not she in retracing her steps now follow his?” (187). In fact, Porter’s interest in Jacobitism was perfectly consistent with the fascination for embattled small nations which characterised her career. Furthermore, Porter’s treatment of Jacobitism differed from Scott’s in the emphasis it placed upon the cyclical vision of history frequently employed in Jacobite propaganda.<sup>319</sup> In other words, Porter’s interest was not in history as change but in tradition.

This becomes most clearly evident in Porter’s 1828 novel, *The Field of Forty Footsteps*, published as a collaborative project with Anna Maria’s *Coming Out*. Jane Porter’s novel dealt with the time of the Commonwealth, a period often paralleled by Jacobites with the Revolution (Monod 49). Porter emphasises this sense of historical accretion in *The Field of Forty Footsteps*. In a development of

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<sup>318</sup>The tale’s heroine, Miss Mackay, reads Colonel Ferguson’s letter to his sister in order to interpret what she should do in national terms by the coded form of his signature. The Colonel’s weak sister interprets this as love, “she, therefore, handed [the letter] to her evidently expectant companion, accompanying the action with girlish raillery at the obvious understanding betwixt her and her brother” (1: 39). Miss Ferguson remains single, while Miss MacKay marries a man she has met as a direct result of her patriotic efforts.

<sup>319</sup>For a discussion see Monod 49 – 54.

her presentation of folk culture in *The Scottish Chiefs* and *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, Porter creates an image of a pastoral Britain with a many-layered past.<sup>320</sup> At the centre of her story lies a field upon which can still be seen mysterious footsteps from an event (unexplained until almost the final page) which happened in the time of the Commonwealth. The field is linked with political conflict, but another, lying nearby, is, Porter emphasises, the site of folk festival and tradition (3: 2). The field's connection with tradition endures though details change, thus suggesting a cyclical view of history with which only urban encroachment of the narrator's present breaks. Thus the "old tradition" of the forty footsteps is remembered by the boys who played in the field: "Twenty-seven years ago" (Porter, *Footsteps* 3: 1). These boys themselves "appeared on the days of assembling, as in the times of Robin Hood, in full array of belted green, bow, and quiver, and feathered hat; while the especial ground of their exercise (which lay directly behind the Museum garden) displayed targets, flag-staffs, pavilions, and every other pageantry indispensable to that memorial of the ancient gallantry of England" (Porter, *Footsteps* 3: 2 - 3). The boys' activities support an image of England associated with woodland (where even the outlaws have been suitably sanitised) and the atmosphere of romance. The civil conflict always threatening in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) is dramatised in an unthreatening ritual. Indeed, in *Ivanhoe* too, as James Chandler notes, "there is reason to read Scott as creating strong analogies between his own novels and the nonliterary popular amusements of the past, such as the tournament depicted in *Ivanhoe*" (Chandler 44). In *Ivanhoe*, however, the joust, though meant to be a site of consolidation, is a source of social tension. In Porter's novel, the implicit similarity works to promote a sense that the public rituals of fiction and popular entertainment give continuity and stability.

Similarly, the second chapter of *The Field of Forty Footsteps* reveals that the ominous field itself had in the past been connected with innocent festivals -

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<sup>320</sup>The definition of "culture" is contentious – for a brief discussion see Monod 8; here, however, it is used in the sense of folk tale, myth, ballad and popular custom.

“sometime about the years forty and fifty of the seventeenth century,” when “that field formed a lawn-like glade,” it was “a kind of gala-green for the servants and near tenantry, on certain merry-makings, allowed, by long custom, by the munificent owners of the mansion” (Porter, *Footsteps* 3: 16). These servants and tenants, Porter explains, also had their celebrations of the past in the form of chivalric contests. Thus, though the form of the festival changes, there seems to be a kind of meta-convention which suggests that each tradition captures and neutralises the power struggles of the past. In that context, Porter’s description of the “annual holidays we speak of as celebrated on this spot [ . . . ] May-day, Lammas-tide, and similar summer-feasts” has a particular significance (3: 17). May-day rituals had been associated with Charles Edward Stuart because they suggested the return of Spring, renewal and fertility in a cyclical vision of history (Monod 45 – 69). Porter is deliberately playing up the notion of history as continuity rather than as change – the only change she wishes to point up at all is the shift from pastoral to urban. Indeed, even this is a minor detail when compared to the far greater emphasis Scott places on the replacement of romance by contemporary economic and urban reality. Porter, it is clear, is not as interested in emphasising the contrast between past and present.

Porter emphasises history as continuity in order to create a British identity which acknowledges but is not threatened by past political conflict. Such an identity would incorporate past political and national strife by including the traditions such conflict generates. The exact tradition may vary, but the meta-convention of its neutralising effect remains. Porter’s creation of this meta-convention can be better understood when compared to Burke’s sublime of succession. Burke finds succession and uniformity of parts constitute the artificial infinite:

Succession; which is requisite that the parts may be continued so long, and in such a direction, as by their frequent impulses on the sense to



impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits. (*Enquiry* 74; 2, 9)

The way in which the pastoral and folk traditions recede into the past provides a similar impression. However, Burke's other condition, uniformity, might seem to present a problem; "*Uniformity*, because if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check" (*Enquiry* 74; 2, 9). The details of history seem to present such an obstacle; however, the convention that each struggle be naturalised as a tradition provides a general sameness.

There is however, a difference in emphasis between the two writers; Burke's example is a great building, while Porter's writing suggests a much more inclusive folk tradition. The folk festivals and tale telling of Porter's *The Field of Forty Footsteps* represent an alternative insurance of social stability to inherited property. The pastoral settings which Porter concentrates on for much of the novel provide a place of education to everyone, not just to the owners of the land. The heroine, Betha, is first seen within the confines of a garden where she is schooled personally and politically, consoled for her mother's death and given a scroll containing details of Charles I's execution warrant. The old gardener who gives her the scroll, is of low social status, but has patriotic feelings - he is able to remember the past regime though he sees nothing to celebrate in its passing. Thus, Porter creates the sense of a pastoral heritage where political turmoil is gradually transformed into tradition. The footsteps themselves form some kind of exception to this - connected with events of the Commonwealth and a resultant fratricide, they are an unhealed scar on the natural landscape and a reminder that political discord occurs in Britain. However, their traditionary status, their further reworking in novelistic form, and their link to the pastoral makes them only slightly more sinister than the "towers of an old fortress" Ann Radcliffe sees on her return to Britain (*Journey* 370). In addition, the footsteps are about to be buried forever beneath Russell Square, covered by the advancing urban sprawl of central London. Thus, Porter sets her story in the civil war, but connects the pastoral and the traditional in such a

way that the domestic effects of civil strife look like the scar of a season yet are strangely enduring.

In *The Field of Forty Footsteps* Porter suggests that the folktale and tradition absorb unrest. The rejected political systems of the past are not buried in some underground recess, as all too often in the gothic novel, but are replayed in full cultural view - until, that is, they are finally built over and erased. Porter's historical consciousness, it would seem, focuses not so much on an Enlightenment narrative of social progress, as upon a story of convention, custom and slow change. Tradition and the folktale function for her as moral convention does for West - and as Miranda J. Burgess argues literary convention works for Austen. In *Lessons of Romanticism; A Critical Companion* (1998), "Domesticating Gothic: Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, and National Romance," Burgess writes:

In her domestic novels, which are also national romances Austen rested the full weight of legitimacy, not, like Hazlitt, on representation or consent, nor, like his opponent Edmund Burke, on virtue, chastity, and nature, nor even, like Richard Hurd and the gothic revivalists, on Britain's native cultural inheritance, but on romance itself. Although the threats of 'illegitimacy' and generic instability surface often in Austen's novels, her reformation of romance, seen retrospectively from a position of generic solidity, permitted Scott to naturalize literary history as the result of the legitimate inheritance of genres, rendering romance's descent unproblematically linear and smooth and turning it to the service of nationhood.<sup>321</sup>

Porter bears an interesting relationship to the alternate narratives of legitimacy which Burgess outlines. Her narratives of political strife and emphasis on cultural inheritance - the epigraph to *The Scottish Chiefs* is from Ossian - link

her to Hurd. However, it should also be remembered that Porter insists on the shared knowledge of folk history in *The Scottish Chiefs* and upon the importance of the repetition of festival in *The Field of Forty Footsteps*. The continuity and shared nature of the cultural inheritance is as important as the cultural inheritance itself. In other words, folk tradition plays the role that Burgess suggests the romance does in Austen. Ultimately, perhaps, there is not much difference between the two methods – for all Porter’s emphasis upon the folk tradition, she operates in the medium of print rather than in the oral medium with which she associates the folk tale. Porter’s audience would have as much “reader’s sagacity” about romance conventions as Austen’s readers (Austen, *Novels* 5: 247). In another way, however, the distinction is significant. Porter’s emphasis on folk traditions rather than romance suggests a frank attempt to deploy historical tales as propaganda.

Tradition and the authorial persona function in Porter’s work to uphold a sense of enduring, yet evolving, national identity. In particular, she emphasised historical sources in order to highlight the force of tradition in the public sphere. Her awareness of historical sources can be seen particularly in an 1845 edition of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* to which she added an essay entitled “Notes Chiefly Relating to General Kosciusko.”<sup>322</sup> It is also emphasised by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora A Smith in their 1921 edition of *The Scottish Chiefs*.<sup>323</sup> They suggest that Porter consulted every “writing of the sister kingdoms during the period of her narrative,” including Speed, Buchanan, Holinshed, “Of Barbour’s ‘Bruce’, of the old epic song of ‘Thyr William Wallace’, of the letters of the royal Edward and Pope Boniface, of the rhymes of Thomas Ercildowne and the verses of ‘Blinde Harrie’ ”

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<sup>321</sup>Miranda J. Burgess, “Domesticating Gothic: Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, and National Romance,” in *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Companion*, eds. Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner (London: Duke UP) 392 – 412, quoted from 393.

<sup>322</sup>Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw: A New and Illustrated Edition Revised and Enriched with New Notes, etc.* (London: Virtue, 1845); for a discussion of the novel’s relation to Polish history see Lynne Hamer, “Folklore and History Studies in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Jane Porter and Anna Eliza Bray,” *The Folklore Historian: Journal of the Folklore and History Section of the American Folklore Society* 10 (1993): 5 – 28.

<sup>323</sup>Kate S. Wiggin and N. A. Smith, ed. *The Scottish Chiefs*, by Jane Porter, illus. N. C. Wyeth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922); subsequently Wiggin and Smith.

(Wiggin vi - vii).<sup>324</sup> However, their list is misleading for Porter herself is far more elusive when it comes to identifying her sources in print. She manages her sources very discreetly, facilitating her national romance by combining official and personal accounts. In her "Preface to the First Edition" of *The Scottish Chiefs*, for example, she shifts rapidly between emphasising her reliance on historical events, and discussing her own alteration of sources. Thus she says she wishes to keep near "historical truth," then tellingly adds as far "as could be consistent with [her] plan" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: xxiv). Confusing the boundaries between sourced materials and her own inventions further, she indicates the authenticated nature of one of the chief incidents in her story by remarking that, "though it may be thought too much like the creation of modern romance, [it] is recorded as a fact in the old poem of Blind Harrie" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: xxiv). Having suggested that the reader may not be able to discern the difference between fiction and historical sources, she then reassures him that he will be guided: "Some notes are added, to confirm the historical incidents" (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: xxiv). Then even this assurance is undermined, as Porter remarks that, if she had detailed the historical provenance for each place visited, "such a plan would swell each volume beyond its proper size; in one word, I assure the reader, that I seldom lead him to any spot in Scotland, whither some written or oral testimony respecting my hero, had not previously conducted myself" (*Chiefs* 1: xxiv - xxv). The reader cannot, it seems, rely on his own judgment or on the editorial apparatus, but has to trust Porter's suggestion that it is only the novel form which leads her to distort her sources (*Chiefs* 1: xxv). Porter gives an account of her sources which amalgamates serious history, romance and personal experience. The resulting impression is that national history is at once both complex and intimate, an arena in which the author and the conventions of fiction are the most trustworthy guides and yet simultaneously a narrative to which each virtuous member of society should have access.

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<sup>324</sup>See also Elizabeth Walsh, "Hary's Wallace: The Evolution of a Hero," *Scottish Literary Journal: A Review of Studies in Scottish Language and Literature* (1984): 5 - 19.

In particular, Porter suggests the importance of national community, the input of ordinary people into the patriotic myth. This becomes more obvious when Porter's practice with regard to her sources is compared with Scott's. While the main body of his text is, like Porter's, largely omnisciently narrated, as Trumpener remarks his "elaborate documentary framework of footnotes and pseudo-editorial comments" reflect "the footnoted debates between late eighteenth-century antiquarians over editorial practices, the elaborate apparatus and ironic polyglossia of Gibbon's historiography [. . .] foregrounding the retroactive, antiquarian production of historical knowledge out of a myriad of experiences, records and possible reconstructions" (710). Porter's version is also created out of a myriad of types of experience, but all of her material operates to construct a template of national heroism and grief. More importantly, she avoids privileging "the perspective of antiquarian narrators over that of the historical participants" (710). As a historical participant with a divine mission Wallace, for example, has access to a transcendental truth beyond the scope of the Enlightenment historian. Furthermore, most of Porter's patriots, past and present, spin their own versions of history. They are not "antiquarian narrators," but domestic storytellers or bards, yet Porter still suggests their narratives have greater value than traditionally higher status forms. As she claims in the Retrospective Introduction to *The Scottish Chiefs* in Scotland she heard "not from the gentlemen and ladies, readers of history; but from the maids in the nursery" songs and tales expressing the glory of the Scottish heritage (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: viii). Her memories of her nurse similarly suggest the primacy of folk tradition over more professional histories. She writes that though the nurse has a bible (and hence potentially, access to the sublime of virtue): "I do not recollect ever seeing any other book in her house; though she knew the history of Scotland, and the biography of its great families" as accurately as if she had read historical chronicles (Porter, *Chiefs* 1: ix). Porter thus emphasises the input of ordinary individuals into national myth. What Porter's alleged use of fresh firsthand evidence in *The Scottish Chiefs* does, is enable her to steer clear of "the

ambiguous legacy of past literary representations of the periphery, and the imperial modes of cultural interpretation they establish" (Trumpener 700). Her claimed reliance on oral sources partially seals her fictions from objective historical analysis, making their picture of countrywide patriotism less assailable.

In 1819 Scott had presented an equivocal attitude to such attempts at popular appeal. In the first chapter of *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) Peter Pattieson gives the tale of Dick Tinto, the son of a tailor. Dick begins his career as an artist by painting the signs of public houses. From there, he proceeds to portraiture and even to what might be considered history painting – a painting capturing the (supposedly true) events recounted in the body of the novel. However, as his trade runs dry he determines to go to Edinburgh and, in order to clear his debts, paints the sign of a public house with "the majestic head of Sir William Wallace, grim as when severed from the trunk by the orders of the felon Edward" (Scott, *Waverley Novels* 14: 10). Dick wishes to paint for the most discerning audience possible, but Scott's narrator argues that both history painters and novelists must sometimes work to entertain those fonder of their pleasure than their reason. Scott's character is ashamed of his demotion to painter of inn signs. For Porter, some nine years later, however, such involvement in the public sphere is an opportunity to create a sense of stable national identity. In writing her novels Porter has not generated a sharp sense of historical change; she has accentuated the possible links between past and present patriotic virtues. Her use of history painting, Jacobite conceptions of history, and the thought of Edmund Burke all enable her to emphasise the potential for continuity despite the melancholy of change.

## Conclusion

Returning to the early morning stroll across unmarked grass with which this thesis began, it is possible to see that Wollstonecraft's insistence on firsthand experience was only one of a range of approaches to literary precedent available at that time. In the same way in which Wollstonecraft's emphasis on originality stemmed from her suspicion of an unreasoning adherence to tradition, the attitudes of her near contemporaries to taste and the sublime and the beautiful reflected their own distinctive political thought. However, the complexity of the debate is frequently overlooked, even in the most sophisticated feminist criticism. In her article "A History of the Precedent: Rhetorics of Legitimation in Women's Writing" Catherine Gallagher rightly connects Wollstonecraft's "inability to acknowledge her own precedents" with her emphasis on reason but she does so in order to make Wollstonecraft an example in her "capsule history of the precedent."<sup>325</sup> Gallagher argues:

A skeptical reading of Wollstonecraft's preface demonstrates that when the prevailing notion of authorship requires writers to declare their allegiance to some entity - such as reason, nature, or virtue - considered more compelling than custom, they will tend to stress their hard-won freedom from the shackles of tradition imprisoning the minds of other authors. (311)

Gallagher claims that Wollstonecraft did not challenge "the common forms of legitimation embracing authorship in her period," in emphasising both reason and independence, but this study demonstrates that Wollstonecraft chose a highly contentious route (311). Gallagher's account does not acknowledge that many other (female) authors of this time were engaged in a struggle to define "the prevailing notion of authorship," and that their attitudes to custom and reason varied widely.

The historical detail given in this thesis demonstrates that available models of authorship were vigorously contested and questioned by women writers in this period.

This study has aimed to avoid the at times monolithic approach of feminist criticism by providing a detailed examination of a range of its authors' work. During this exploration of their thought on taste, the sublime and the beautiful, however, some interesting areas of enquiry arose which did not fall within this study's remit. In particular, other terms associated with taste, for instance, the picturesque and the Addisonian 'novel,' have received little attention. Directions for further research might include an examination of either or both in relation to metamorphic beauty. It also became evident during the development of the thesis that these writers' interest in and conception of regional and national identity would provide substantial material for further research.

This enquiry has, however, during its discussion of taste, provided an exploration of "the common forms of legitimation embracing authorship" for women writers during the period (Gallagher 311). It demonstrated the way in which Reeve, reflecting her Old Whiggish upbringing, used romance to emphasise the importance of morality to the (political) life of the country. In so doing, she allotted women a wider socio-political function as well as the critical authority noted by Runge. Her utilisation of the roles offered by romance and romance criticism was essential to this. Having explored the difficulty of claiming either literary authority or equality through the classical tradition, Reeve exploited the transformations associated with romance, making her representative guide, enchantress, warrior and maiden in order to gain critical authority.

The very polyvalence of romance made it politically vulnerable, both to criticism and political hijacking, as the extent of Reeve's anxiety to associate it with

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<sup>325</sup> Catherine Gallagher, "A History of the Precedent: Rhetorics of Legitimation in Women's Writing," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 309 - 27, in particular 316 and 311; subsequently



moral instruction indicates. The uncertain political status of the romance was also interrogated by Sophia and Harriet Lee. To a greater extent than either Walpole or Reeve, Sophia Lee and her sister, Harriet, exemplify the extreme distrust of literary history that Richter connects with the gothic. Suspicious of the construction of literary and historical authority and of aesthetic disinterestedness, the Lees reveal the way in which such narratives elide certain voices from cultural and national discourse. Using both romance and the tale, the Lees examine how public narratives and formal discourses pressure the individual into the sublime of terror or into the manoeuvring and metamorphoses of the beautiful.

The romance tradition came to be viewed with suspicion both by women writers in their search for critical authority and by radical politicians in the 1790s. The connection between romance and political decay, already latent in *The Progress of Romance*, became more evident. For this Burke's *Reflections* were partly responsible. Romance was connected by radicals with an unreasoning, or even corrupt, adherence to tradition and a slavish attitude to power. For the conservatives it was associated with sceptical philosophy, atheism and a loss of a coherent sense of self.

One way of dealing with this hostility to romance and to scepticism was to show an interest in the philosophy of human nature while decrying the systematisers. This is emphasised by Elizabeth Hamilton who distanced herself from "metaphysicks" and emphasised her hostility both to romance and to the models of chivalry, metamorphic beauty and terror attached to it. Her attitude is shown by Benger's remarks on *Letters on Education*. Benger indicates that in the *Letters* Hamilton tried to apply the work of "the best moral and metaphysical writers," making it "practically useful" (Benger 1: 221). This was also true of her attitude to taste, the sublime and the beautiful.

Hamilton redefined the sublime and the beautiful in a way which indicated that her answers to the political issues of the 1790s depended on a Christian

framework rather than upon a Burkean dialectic of weakness and strength. Hamilton did not wish to connect the sublime with terror – whether of the mob, the arbitrary aristocratic ruler or (as often in Radcliffe’s work) the bourgeois usurper. Instead, the sublime and the beautiful were associated respectively with divine beneficence and human morality. In terms of taste, she wished to make attention to human emotion more valuable than learning, valour or power. Correspondingly, her model of the arbiter of taste possesses qualities considered feminine and Christian rather than those connected with a classical education. Hamilton was also resolute that a good sense of taste, based on attention to every day experience, could be taught. For Hamilton, taste, a sense of affection and awareness of an object’s utility were intrinsically connected and were, whatever one’s station, essential to a successful life. Insisting on this, she promoted a more democratic version of the aesthetic experience.

Creating a distance from the scepticism associated with radical thought in some cases involved highlighting specific applications of the philosophy of the mind (as for the Edgeworths, the title of whose *Practical Education* distinguished them from “castle-builders” yet whose educational theory was influenced by Locke). Greater detachment still could be achieved by emphasising the particularity and peacefulness of life within a feminized Britain, as for West. Porter, however, wished to revitalise some of the imagery associated with romance. She examined and rehabilitated a version of metamorphic beauty and simultaneously developed a new kind of enclosed, even feminine, but patriotic sublime. She rewrote the sublime so that it could be used in the context of the domestic and everyday.

The link between the sublime and domesticity was, however, hard to maintain. Instead, Porter portrayed a British identity reliant upon folk tales and customs. The Lees had earlier questioned the relationship between the tale and the romance. In their writing, the tale allowed the discussion of political intrigue which romance might gloss too highly; it allowed wider cultural

enfranchisement. For Porter too the folktale, harper's song and nurse's tale all allowed an apparently widespread participation in the culture. However, Porter's use of her sources indicates that, in her account, these disparate sources are ultimately controlled by the novelist who shapes them into national myth. Tradition and the authorial persona which shapes it function in Porter's work to uphold a sense of enduring, Christian national identity.

## Bibliography

### Preliminary Notes

Where contemporary reviews have titles headed by the abbreviation “Art.” they are alphabetized under the title of the novel reviewed.

Where excerpts from anthologies have been referred to in the body of the thesis, it is the anthology title which is listed in the bibliography as a primary text.

Where several reviews have been taken from the same website, the full website address is only given in the first instance, though the contribution number is given for each item. Full citations have been given in the text.

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