



*A space for women? Space and place in women's novels, 1790 -1820.*

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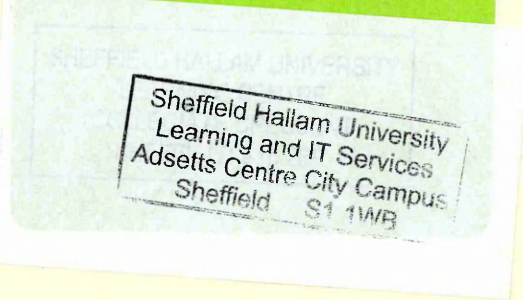
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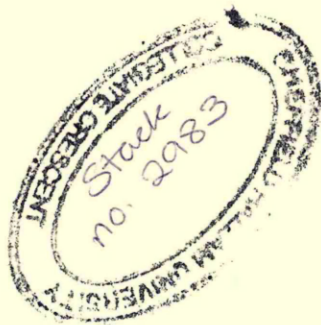
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**A Space for Women? Space and Place in Women's Novels,  
1790 – 1820**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the emergence of the novel as a writing site for women writers and traces the ways in which women novelists between 1790 and 1820 represented space within their novels. It identifies how women used both the space afforded by the novel, and the representations of space in the novel, to enter the public sphere.

Chapter 1 examines theories of the novel to show how it both reflects society and can become an agent for change in society. The chapter examines how important this was for women since the novel might enable them to establish a viewpoint that was distinct from the supposed universal viewpoint adopted by male society. The chapter also examines theories describing the growth of the public sphere, and explores how far women might use the novel as their way of entering the public sphere.

Chapter 2 examines novels by women writers where one of the characters is a woman who writes. I argue that in general women novelists took more risks as writers than they allowed their heroines to do, since the heroines usually relinquished their writing careers on getting married.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the epistolary novel in women novelists' attempts to capitalise on the site afforded by the novel. If heroines were restricted in their novel writing, they did not need to be restricted in their letter writing. Thus the letter form allowed women novelists an opportunity to voice a wide range of viewpoints, both female and male, on such subjects as marriage, education, slavery, war and peace.

Chapter 4 examines the use made by women novelists of the preface and interventions in the text, both to defend themselves as novel writers and to express their views on a wide variety of subjects. It analyses the extensive references to other writers, books and libraries, particularly the circulating libraries.

Chapter 5 moves into an analysis of space within the novel, especially the house as the domestic space proper to women. It explores novels where the representation of women's position in their childhood or marital homes reflects their position in society in general.

Chapter 6 analyses the difficulties which women encountered in real life when moving beyond the confines of the house and shows how these difficulties were represented in novels by women.

The study concludes by suggesting that the novel was an important writing site for women where they could enter the public sphere and stake a claim to cultural capital. It suggests, however, that although this claim was often weakened by certain women novelists who were determined to repudiate the radical views, in particular, of women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, it was nevertheless partly redeemed by the approach of others who succeeded in being both radical and Christian at the same time.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction: the Space of the Novel

### 1. Aims and Structure of the Thesis

The main aim of this research is to discover what the novel could and could not do for women in the period 1790 to 1820: in particular how British women novelists could use both the space afforded by the novel and the representation of space and place within the novel. I wanted to explore how far the novel was the writing site where they could bring together two aspects of their lives, the public and private, capitalising on both the space of the novel and the representation of lived-in spaces within the novel. Women novelists discussed these issues explicitly in their novels. For example, Alethea Lewis referred to herself and other novelists as “sovereigns in our own province,” a term which would allow her to write about whatever she wanted, in this instance, slavery (Lewis:1800: Vol.3:95). Women, whether middle or upper class, used the reading and writing of novels, activities which took place in the domestic sphere, to make statements about society, an activity associated with the public sphere. Fanny Burney, in the preface to *Evelina* (1778), described her novel as being about “the progression of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her Entrance into the World” (1778:1982:8). *Evelina*’s move from the country parsonage, where she was brought up, into the wider society of London, country house estate and Bristol Hotwells, represents at the same time the way in which Burney’s novel might progress, from being the work of an anonymous writer to being recognised as the work of an established woman author.

The particular aspect I want to investigate throughout this thesis is the idea of the novel as a profitable writing site for women; profitable not only because it could provide an income but also because it allowed them to accumulate cultural capital:<sup>1</sup> it was a site where they could write about the spaces and places they inhabited. The novel, as Claudia Johnson has pointed out, was the most productive site for women: “The novel’s accessibility to authors lacking a classical education, its relatively wide public, and its formal suppleness made it a natural choice for an aspiring writer interested in treating the subjects of virtue, desire, education, genius, sociability, sensibility and justice” (2000:190). Claudia Johnson’s list of subjects covers all areas, domestic and public, that affected women’s lives in this period. Since the narratives

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital later in this chapter.

of most novels at this time were based on a love story that ended with marriage, novelists had to be concerned with the issue of property; thus the representation of the spaces and communities where women and men were situated, particularly the houses where they lived, was an integral part of those novels.

The period from 1790 to 1820 has been chosen because it covers the events of the French Revolution and its aftermath, when there were widespread debates about the rights of men and women; and when *The Lady's Magazine*, aimed at women readers, offered comments on political events alongside the fashion plates. This period, at least up to 1808, also covers a time when there was an explosion in the publication of novels by women (Garside:1997). For the year 1808, which Peter Garside claims is the peak year with 111 novels being published, 50 were by women.<sup>2</sup> This increase followed the steady growth of novels by women throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The preponderance of women writers was recognised at the time: the male novelist, J.Byerley, in his *Essay on Novel Writing* attached to his first novel, *A Picture of the Passions* (1804) referred to brother and sister authors “who are much the larger body in this department of literature” (1804:5). Thus, all those women who were writing novels, and the even greater number who were reading novels, were brought face to face with the representation of issues connected with the private and public aspects of their lives. The novel was profitable for women, not only because women were able to write and publish so many, but also because of the nature of the writing, which allowed women to explore a variety of voices which they might not have felt free to express in other genres (Bakhtin:1981). The exploration of those voices gave women an opportunity to circumvent their “socially constructed disadvantage”, as Elizabeth Bohls puts it, and established the novel as one of the most available sites for making their viewpoints known (1995:20). Married women could not own property and upper and middle-class women were not expected to take up employment outside the home. Jobs as governess and lady’s maid were open to, but poor prospects for, the middle-

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<sup>2</sup> There were 41 by men and 20 by still unidentified authors. He also gives figures for Minerva, one of the five biggest publishers, for the period 1800 to 1829. In this period over 54% of their novels were by women, (this includes 31% named, 19.1% he was able to identify as by women, and 3.1% with implied women authors) 31.4% by men, and the rest so far unidentified. Since the majority of the originally unidentified ones turned out to be by women, the chances are that the last 15% may well contain a majority of women authors as well.

<sup>3</sup> See Jane Spencer’s *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986) which does for women novelists what Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957) does for male novelists; and J.M.S. Tompkins *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (1932:1961).

class woman, left unmarried and unprovided for; while mantua-making, which offered semi-respectable work for lower-middle class women, was gradually taken over by men.<sup>4</sup> I therefore expected to find women novelists highlighting the social disadvantages and difficulties of their heroines, which often paralleled their own, and thus, I hoped their novels would supply evidence of their attempts to come to terms with their own dilemmas as women writers.

This thesis consists of six chapters: this first chapter reviews contemporary and later theories of the novel, the next three analyse the space of the novel, and the last two analyse the spaces within the novel. In this chapter I examine the role of the novel in society and explore how far the development of the novel out of the earlier romance might afford women advantages in an era when women were claiming the same rational powers as men, but were still unable to take part in most areas of public life. I examine the theories of David Harvey (1993) who is interested in the modern novel as a way of understanding modern society; and his insistence on the importance of the situatedness and the positionality of writers as they are writing.<sup>5</sup> I also examine the theory of Jurgen Habermas on the growth of the public sphere, to see how far it might throw light on the way women could use their novels as their own contribution to a public sphere that was not easily accessible to them. I then examine the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1984;1993), as a way of highlighting how women might make claims to their own field and accumulate their own cultural capital, as part of a community of writers, which even if not recognised by all sections of society, was nevertheless implicit, and sometimes explicit, in the references made in their novels. I then examine some contemporary views on women's participation in the public sphere, in particular those of Anna Letitia Barbauld, who exemplified some of the conflicts and contradictions in women's access to the public sphere, directly and through literature.

If women were to build their own cultural capital as writers, they might be expected to create women characters in their novels who themselves were writers. With this in mind, I explore in chapter 2 those novels of women novelists who included women

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<sup>4</sup> Besides Bohls, quoted above, see also Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, (eds.) *Gender in Eighteenth Century England*. (1997).

<sup>5</sup> I explain situatedness and positionality in more detail later in this chapter, but generally I take these words to refer to class, gender and nationality.

writers among their characters. I investigate whether or not women authors were more determined writers than their heroines. I refer to some relevant, but earlier, examples published before 1790, which highlight the problems of women novel-writers in real life and in the novel, in particular the work of Jane Barker (1713;1723), and compare their writing heroines with those in novels later in the century. This illustrates how women novelists in the period 1790 to 1820 were not the first to realise the effectiveness of the novel as a writing site for women. As a touchstone for analysing how society regarded these writing women, both in and out of the novel, I discuss contributions to *The Lady's Magazine* during the period 1789 to 1815 on the position of writers and how far women writers might be admired as writers, but not esteemed as women.

I then extend this analysis, to explore in chapter 3, how far the structure of the epistolary novel could be used to empower both women authors and their heroines (and heroes) who wrote letters and memoirs. This empowerment might also be evident in first and third person narratives, which at the same time incorporate letters. Since real letters were initially written in and expected to be read in the private sphere without the intervention of any kind of public or publication, epistolary novels might offer women writers a site where they felt at home, both literally and metaphorically. Early epistolary novels were, indeed, no more than the making public of seemingly private letters.

In order to examine how much further women novelists might exploit the space of the novel, I move on, in chapter 4, to explore the extent to which prefaces and authorial interventions in the narratives might give women writers a further site for their comments on society and allowed them to justify themselves as authors. In direct contrast with the technique of the letter, where authors empowered their characters, authorial interventions allowed authors to make more explicit, if sometimes less subtle statements. Their interventions and comments were not only about marriage as the central theme of most novels, but also about their rights to the space of the novel itself. Novels, or books more generally, were used as metaphors or icons for distinguishing women who were readers and writers from those who were not. Many women novelists alluded in their novels to other novelists and novels, and to the role of libraries and bookshops, aware, as they were, of the important part played by

circulating libraries in giving them a foothold in the public sphere through being the writers and readers of the books in those libraries. As a touchstone for analysing the position of women as readers, I refer to further contributions, particularly on the subject of libraries, in *The Lady's Magazine*.

Thus in chapters 2, 3 and 4 I discuss the space of the novel as the site where women might be able to combine the private and the public aspects of their lives. I link these chapters to chapters 5 and 6 where I investigate how far women novelists could exploit the representation of private and public spaces within the novel itself, by an examination at the end of chapter 4 of the representation of libraries as social and reading sites within the novels. I therefore move, in chapter 5, to examine novels where the representation of houses, land and property might illustrate what was at stake for female characters: the house might sometimes be a safe place for women, the place where they first learned to read and write, and, if they were fortunate, the place where they could educate their children and make a useful contribution by running a household and estates that contributed to the life of their community. On the other hand, these same houses could very quickly be turned into threatening places, where they might be incarcerated without access to books or paper for writing. Women had to move beyond the house, as Burney made plain in both *Evelina* (1778) and *The Wanderer* (1814) and thus in chapter 6, I examine the way women novelists might represent their lives through referring to women walking and travelling and visiting public places. As a parallel to the issue of admiration and esteem, explored in chapter 2, chapters 5 and 6 explore the related issue of property and propriety. Upper and middle class women at this time were expected to marry for reasons based on ownership of property; and expected to act with propriety, which often did not allow them to partake of the full range of reading and writing they might be interested in. In this way I move from the theory of the novel as writing site, discussed in this chapter, to an analysis of how authors structured the production of their own and their characters' voices in chapters 2, 3 and 4, and then to the examination of sites within the novel in chapters 5 and 6.

My intention throughout the thesis is to analyse in each of these chapters some of the better known women novelists of the period, and to compare them with some of the lesser or unknown novelists. I would argue that the fact that there were so many



women novelists is as significant as the issues that were raised in the novels. The better known novelists include Charlotte Smith, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Hays, Eliza Fenwick, Mary Robinson, Ann Radcliffe, Elizabeth Hamilton, Amelia Opie, Mary Wollstonecraft and Sidney Owenson.. Some of the less well-known novelists, or their lesser-known novels, include Alethea Lewis (also calling herself Eugenia de Acton), Elizabeth Sara Villa-Real Gooch, Helena Wells, Anne Harding, Mrs Foster, Rachel Hunter, Maria Hunter, Esther Holsten, Amelia Beauclerc, Sarah Wilkinson and Sophia Lee.

I refer to six novels by Alethea Lewis, three by Villa-Real Gooch as well as her autobiography, and two by Helena Wells. Where I have not been able to find novels by Lewis, Gooch and Wells in libraries such as the British Library, I have read their novels on microfiche in the Corvey Collection held by Sheffield Hallam University or online versions provided by the Chawton House Library. Others in the Corvey or Chawton collections include, Mrs Foster, Rachel Hunter and Maria Hunter, Amelia Beauclerc, Sophia Lee, Sarah Wilkinson and Esther Holsten. Some are referred to because their novels highlight a particular kind of writing, for example, epistolary or use of memoirs and first person narrative; others because their novels make explicit political, social or literary comments; others because they include examples of places and spaces which illustrate the life of women in safe and unsafe houses, or in public places like libraries, streets and places of entertainment.

Thus, the thesis as a whole aims to explore how far women could use the space of the novel to explore the society in which they lived, and, by implication or openly, to recommend ways in which women's roles might be changed for the benefit, not only of women, but of the whole of society. The thesis explores what kind of resistance they met from men and from some of their own sex, and what techniques they found to circumvent criticism both of themselves and of their heroines. The thesis explores, too, how far this community of novel writing women agreed with each other, in their analyses and recommendations, beyond the belief that they had the right to occupy the space of the novel. The thesis, therefore, examines society and its theorisation, as a way of understanding the place of women's novels in society, while concomitantly examining novels, in particular the representation of space within the novels, as a way of elucidating the position of women in that society.

## 2. The Purposes and Characteristics of the Novel

“I scruple not to confess that when I take up a novel, my end and object is entertainment”...it is the novel’s “legitimate end and object...The unpardonable sin in a novel is dullness,” writes Anna Letitia Barbauld in her introduction to the selections of recent British novels she edited in 1809 (1820:44). However, most novels offer the reader more than entertainment: they tell the reader about life and society at the period in which the novel is set or the period in which the author is writing. Novels both reflect the society in which they are set and at the same time may well influence that society. As J. Paul Hunter has pointed out in his discussion of ways of analysing eighteenth century novels, when novelists represent what is happening in their society, it is not a simple activity:

To ‘represent’ thus means to approximate in another medium what a novelist sees and wishes to preserve, but it also means to be a substitute, an advocate, someone who acts on behalf of, as do representatives in a legislature. The role of the writer as an agent – though not always an altogether conscious one – of the culture is thus underscored....when novelists become a culture’s representative, they also become part of the process of change itself (1996:30).<sup>6</sup>

I want to argue that women novelists were necessarily involved in this double process as reflectors and agents. This way of analysing novels, to some extent, eliminates the necessity of discussing the difference between romance and novel, a distinction which Margaret Anne Doody claims is “part of a problem, not part of a solution” (1996:15). It would be more useful if the English language did not make this distinction: in French and German, for example, there is only one word for both romance and novel (roman/Roman). Doody’s argument is that without the distinction, we can go back to classical antiquity for the first novels and accept novels from cultures worldwide.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, if we look at what contemporary women write about novels, we can see that Anna Letitia Barbauld thinks that fiction, and she does not distinguish between the terms fiction and novel, has a long history. In her introduction to an edition of the

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<sup>6</sup> It is as if the novelist is engaged in the formation of the literary public sphere as defined by Jurgen Habermas: private people coming together to discuss public affairs. I discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> It also means we can look at novels regardless of whether to label them, for example, sentimental or Gothic. Barbauld’s collection mentioned below contains examples of both: Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791) and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791).

*Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, she claims: “There is no period in the history of any country, at all advanced in elegant literature, in which fictitious adventures have not made a large part of the reading men have delighted in” (1804:vii). She repeats this in the introduction to her edition of recent British novelists, *On the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing from the British Novelists*, and then claims that if only there had been room for translations, she would have included *Theagenes and Chariclea* (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) by Heliodorus (1820:4). She is also aware of the dual roles of novelists. Novels, she says, “have been moulded upon the manners of the age and in return have influenced not a little the manners of the next generation, by the principles they have insinuated, and the sensibilities they have exercised.” She recognises the novel as a “powerful engine.” She refers to the way novels “take tincture from the learning and politics of the times, and are often made use of successfully to attack or to recommend the prevailing systems of the day. “Novels,” she says “ought to command our warmest praise”(1804:viii).

Nevertheless, room or no room, Barbauld does not include Heliodorus. Thus, there is an underlying assumption that the novel is different from the romance. Other women writing about the novel at roughly the same time, saw the dangers of romance, as the wrong kind of “powerful engine,” precisely because of its lack of situatedness. Fanny Burney, some thirty years earlier, in her preface to *Evelina* (1778), warns her readers that they will not be “transported to the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, where Reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the Marvellous rejects all aid from sober Probability” (1778: 1982:8).<sup>8</sup> Her approach echoes what Samuel Johnson wrote in *The Rambler* as far back as 1750:

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 in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind (1750:4).<sup>9</sup>

The dangers of the “powerful engine” working in the wrong way are never more clearly spelled out than in Mary Wollstonecraft’s reviews for Joseph Johnson’s *Analytical Review*, although she often refers to badly constructed novels, rather than

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<sup>8</sup> I examine Burney’s prefaces in more detail in chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> Claudia Johnson points out that Mary Wollstonecraft met Samuel Johnson in 1784 and was probably influenced by him (2002:191).

attacking romances as such. Wollstonecraft ridicules the romantic novel by offering a recipe herself:

unnatural characters, improbable incidents, and sad tales of woe rehearsed in an affected, half-prose, half-poetical style, exquisite double-refined sensibility, dazzling beauty, and elegant drapery, to adorn the celestial body, (these descriptions cannot be too minute), should never be forgotten in a book intended to amuse the fair(cited in Mitzi Myers 1788:2002:86).

Wollstonecraft's real recipe is to be found in her Advertisement to *Mary: a fiction* (1788) where she claims that her book will be about "the mind of a woman who has thinking powers" (1787:1992:3). By contrast, her heroine's mother spends her time reading the wrong sort of novels, "those most delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation" (1787:1992:6).<sup>10</sup> Both Burney and Wollstonecraft see how they can exploit the novel for their own purposes.

Wollstonecraft is not among Barbauld's choice of novelists. Although Barbauld includes only slightly fewer women than men, she mostly includes more than one novel by each of the women represented.<sup>11</sup> However, she does see a difference in the way women write and she asks: "Why is it that women when they write are apt to give a melancholy tinge to their compositions? Is it that they suffer more and have fewer resources against melancholy?" Perhaps her next suggestion is more realistic: "Is it that men, mixing at large in society, have a brisker flow of ideas, and seeing a greater variety of characters, introduce more of the business and pleasures of life into their productions" (1820:42). I would argue that this is an explanation based on the idea of women's situatedness. I return to this point later in this chapter, but here I want to emphasise how even if women are more melancholy than men, they can at least use the novel to express that melancholy. She sees the novel as a more accurate mirror of life than the stage, because "less is sacrificed to effect and representation" (1820:48). If it is an accurate mirror, then what follows from her argument is that women's lives are indeed more melancholy. She ends with perhaps the strongest panegyric of the novel, and one that suits my purposes in showing how the novel is a site for women writers who may not have, or may not wish to have, access to other forms of writing. She describes how "Fletcher of Saltoun said: Let me make the ballads of a nation and I care not who makes the laws. I would say, let me make the

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<sup>10</sup> I examine other aspects of Wollstonecraft's novels in chapter 4 and 5.

<sup>11</sup> In the 28 novels in her collection, 14 male and 8 female novelists are represented. Overall, 11 novels are by women.

novels of a country, and let who will make the systems” (1820:59). She may be referring to both men and women, but since only men at that time were able to take part in system-making, novels gave women an alternative outlet for commenting on and influencing their society. This point is highlighted by an earlier writer, Margaret Cavendish, writing in the second half of the seventeenth century at a time when the novel, according to the traditional view had not really yet “risen”.<sup>12</sup> In her preface to her story, *The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World* (1666), Cavendish uses the words “fiction” and “fancy” to describe what she has written. In their introduction to the recent edition of Cavendish’s writings, Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson label *The Blazing World* science fiction (199:151).<sup>13</sup> Cavendish explains how she has already written a philosophical book based on reason, and now wants to complement it with a book based on fancy, “both being effects, or rather actions of the rational part of matter.” She wants this fiction to be “a world of my own creating.” Along with reason, it is another way of representing the truth and, I would argue from what she says next, obviously one particularly suitable to women, for fancy “creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work” (1555:1999:152). Cavendish realises that:

though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did; yet rather then not to be Mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a World of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every ones power to do the like (1666:1999:152-54).

Thus, like the novelists Barbauld edits over a hundred years later, she can write about systems, even if she cannot make them. Cavendish’s fiction is far from realist, but she is using her version of science fiction to comment on contemporary society.

My contention is that the novel itself might be a site where women could write extensively during the period 1790 to 1820, with more freedom to express their ideas than they might in the more public writing sites such as pamphlets, speeches, history, or even poetry and plays. This is not to say that they did not make use of the latter,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957).

<sup>13</sup> My italics for the word *fiction*.

<sup>14</sup> An obvious example is Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and among my less well-known novelists, Helena Wells’ *Letters to Young Females* (1799). But even those who write supposedly factual reports, as in Helen Maria Williams’ *Letters from France* (1790) or Elizabeth Sara Villa-Real Gooch’s *Wanderings of the Imagination* (1796), use story-telling as part of their repertoire.

but that novels presented them with a more accessible option, both with regard to the extent and content of what they wrote, and to the extent of their audience of readers. As Gary Kelly argues: “One of the formal tasks of women’s fiction is to locate a place for women in a professionalised culture that denies them any significant role in public and professional life” (1988:19). As far as genre within the novel goes, women were able to make use of romance and gothic, but more important was the sentimental and realistic novel (Mellor: 2000:94). Charlotte Lennox in her novel/romance, *The Female Quixote* (1752) uses the form of the novel to put paid to the romance as genre: the heroine, Arabella, eventually learns that women cannot live the lives of the heroines of bygone romantic tales which she has been reading, but must face the realities of everyday life in eighteenth century England. In 1785 Clara Reeve published her account of romance and novel, *The Progress of Romance*, in the form of dialogues in which Euphrasia convinces her antagonist, Hortensius, that romance along with epic poetry are out of date, and it is the novel which counts. Reeve has Euphrasia say:

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 (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own (1785:1930:111).

On the other hand, Ann Radcliffe knows how to make use of unlikely happenings in her Gothic novels, such as *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), in order to highlight the position of women in society.<sup>15</sup>

The novel covers so many possibilities for both writer and reader. It can be read in private or be part of shared reading or even performance. Quite apart from what may be implicit in plot or character, it gives the writer a chance to say something directly in a preface or during authorial intervention in the narrative. For example, Alethea Lewis defends her decision to make up her own mind about what she writes in her novel regardless of possible criticism, by referring to herself and other novelists as

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Copeland says of women’s economic difficulties: “The economy throws its fitful light into the dark castles and gloomy grottoes of the gothic novel” (1995:40).

“sovereigns in our own province” (1799:Vol.3:94).<sup>16</sup> Lewis is making the same claim for herself as Margaret Cavendish does, when she claims she will become Margaret the First in her own world. While both poetry and plays may offer some of these opportunities to the writer,<sup>17</sup> the extended nature of the novel allows both for descriptions of place that characterise poetry, together with the dialogic episodes that characterise drama. The variety of voices, of heteroglossia, has a special place in the novel where stories, told through dialogue, or letters or through the narratives of different characters, can be embedded in the basic structure. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains:

all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meanings, and values. As such they may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people, - first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels (1981:291).

As Julian Holloway and James Kneale argue in their analysis of Bakhtin, the positionality of the speaker is all important (2000:71-88). I would argue that positionality is significant in examining women’s voices, since their voices are the ones that, according to the conduct books of the time, are likely to be marginalized (Jones:1990:14).

Extending this point about positionality, I would emphasise that it is this range of voices in the novel, that offers such possibilities for women to make their own worlds, and at the same time comment on the world they live in. Bakhtin, in fact, makes claims for the uniqueness of the novel: “The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the speaking person and his (sic) discourse.” Re-telling someone else’s discourse in our own words, argues Bakhtin, has a “basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming.” It performs as “authoritative discourse, and an internally persuasive discourse.” Once it becomes merely authoritative it loses its power in the novel. What gives a novel “newer ways to mean” is precisely the possibility of a variety of

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<sup>16</sup> I examine Lewis’s prefaces and authorial interventions in chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Barbauld’s poetry is concerned with public issues as I show later in this chapter; while writers like Joanna Baillie found poetry and plays expressed all she needed; and Elizabeth Inchbald used both novels and plays with equal acclaim and success.

internally persuasive discourses (1981:346). This means that it is the voices within the novel that carry power, rather than the single authoritative/authorial voice. Thus, for instance, Charlotte Smith's epistolary *Desmond* (1792), which allows for a range of voices to come through the different letter-writers, becomes a more powerful tool for expressing a range of viewpoints, than say, Alethea Lewis's *The Microcosm* (1800) with its third person narrator who continually interrupts to lay down the law, thus running the risk of negating some of the other discourses. Bakhtin's argument is borne out by academics such as Simon Schama (1992) and David Harvey (1996) who see fiction, with its internally persuasive discourses, as a way of exploring social and historical themes in a more far-reaching way than either social surveys or historical treatises can achieve, with their authoritative discourses. For Schama as a historian, it is not only a question of using novels of the past as authentic sources, but also of writing fiction himself as a way of exploring the past, for example, in *The Many Deaths of General Wolfe* (1992), where he invents a fictionalised account of the death of General Wolfe, as if written by a soldier in the ranks.<sup>18</sup> Harvey, a geographer, although not writing fiction himself, has seen Raymond Williams' novels, which are set in the 1960s and 1970s, as accurate portrayals of the range of voices within the Welsh mining valleys of that period.<sup>19</sup> He points out how Williams' characters are conscious of their environment, their lives in the mining valleys, the villages straggling below the mountains. It is that consciousness, he argues, that make novels more authentic than sociological surveys.

Harvey asks: "What is it that constitutes a privileged claim to knowledge and how can we judge, understand, adjudicate and perhaps negotiate through different knowledges constructed at very different levels of abstraction under radically different material conditions?" (1996:23). He answers his own question by referring to Williams' organicist approach to the whole of culture. Harvey welcomes Williams' idea of "embeddedness of political action in intimate culture," and the fact that Williams uses environment, space and place to do this (1996:25). What Williams achieves, claims Harvey, quoting from the thoughts of one of Williams' characters in his novel, *People*

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<sup>18</sup> Schama argues that if Benjamin West's fictionalised painting, *The Death of General Wolfe* is an acceptable version of Wolfe's death on the Heights of Abraham, then a fictionalised diary describing his death should be equally acceptable.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams' novels include the trilogy - *Border Country* (1960), *Second Generation* (1964) and *The Fight for Manod* (1979) as well as *People of the Black Mountains* (1989 and 1990).



*of the Black Mountains* (1989), is “not history as narrative, but stories as lives,” where “touch and breadth replaced record and analysis” (Williams:1989:10-12). The novelist has the possibility of supplying a range of voices with implied comment through “touch and breadth” rather than through explicit comment. As Harvey says, there is no closure in a novel compared with the kind of writing undertaken by the historian or the geographer and this is what makes the novel significant. This “touch and breadth” aspect of the novel fits in with Elizabeth Bohls’ (1995) theories about the difference between male and female approaches to aesthetic theory. She argues that while eighteenth century and Romantic period male aesthetic theory pleaded for the general and a move from the particular, women in their travel writing and novels, attempted to subvert such theories put forward by men like Joseph Addison and William Gilpin.<sup>20</sup> It could be that many of the novels by women in the period 1790 to 1820, which deal with “intimate culture,” celebrate the kind of embeddedness that Harvey finds in Williams’ novels; and that they have their own kind of “militant particularism”, another characteristic which Harvey recognises in Williams’ novels (1996:42). This particularism uses the environment, space and place as its touchstone. Harvey and Williams are both concerned with politics and notions of the public sphere, literal and metaphorical (which I examine later in this chapter). They employ and recognise the novel as an alternative/authentic site where the public can be fittingly embedded in the private or intimate. As Williams says: “Most novels are in some sense knowable communities” (1985:164). It is the “knowable communities” of novels that I examine with both reference to structure and content in the following chapters. Harvey uses the novel to help explicate geography: I want to use geography and aesthetics to explore what the novel could offer women in the period under discussion.

The metaphors from geography, used by Harvey and Williams, cover both the overarching tropes as well as themes within the content of novels. When Margaret Doody discusses the tropes of the novel, they are nearly all based on geographic metaphors. She argues that all novels open with the trope of a break or birth, with behind it the threat of death, and with the suggestion of a mending or putting together again. Behind these metaphors is a suggestion of something spatial that comes apart and has

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<sup>20</sup> I analyse this in more detail below in the section on aesthetic theories, and also in chapter 6.

to be joined again in some way (1996:303). This leads her to discuss further tropes which she names as shore, beach, margin and threshold, open door, and so on to the frontier or wild space (1996:19-322). After mentioning the sea and shipwreck amongst other tropes, she continues by explaining tomb, cave and labyrinth. As far as the idea of labyrinth goes, she claims that not only is it a figure in many novels, but in a way represents the whole of the novel itself, its structure and plot (1996:351). I argue in the next section, how the novel can offer a marginal space for writing; and in chapters 5 and 6, I argue that in many novels the metaphor of tomb, cave and labyrinth is often implicit, if not explicit, in the structure of the novel, and in the experiences of the women characters themselves. I take the term “space-off”, coined by Teresa de Lauretis (1987:9), as the space from which women write, to be also the space(s) they write about; and I examine this in the next section.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. The Novel as “Space-off”

It is not only the tropes of the novel that revolve around geographical metaphors. A great deal of linguistic and literary theory uses the metaphor of place/border/limit/confinement to explain what occurs in language, so that writing itself is already positioned as a site from which the writer engages in the writing (Frosch:1995:289; Moi:1985:167; Stratton: 1992).<sup>22</sup> Frosch argues that masculine language depends on women’s absence, so that women are needed for their absence: they mark what is the boundary of masculinity. Woman becomes a spatial fantasy, a boundary around a safe masculine terrain (1995:293). This leaves women in an off-site position when it comes to their own writing, or as Teresa de Lauretis’ term “space-off” denotes, a kind of place which is available for feminine discourse:

it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati (de Lauretis:1987:9).

Following the explanations of Frosch and de Lauretis, I would argue that the novel was the space-off for women writers in the period under discussion; and their heroines

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<sup>21</sup> The final trope that Doody discusses is Eros, which might be thought to have more to do with personality and character than place, but finally Doody highlights the spaces that Eros inhabits in novels, often the house and the garden, which I examine in chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> Frosch’s article is in a book titled *Mapping the Subject* (Pile and Thrift:1995) which in itself implies the importance of placing the writer; similarly, Stratton’s book is called *Writing Sites*.

lived in those “interstices”, “chinks and cracks”. As for the writing itself, far from this being a disadvantage, women theorists have seen the space-off as a positive advantage for their writing.<sup>23</sup> It re-enforces the idea that writers are situated. The metaphorical margin is the site where women can be particular, or in the case of Williams’ Welshness, his novels inhabit a geographical margin. David Harvey, interested in the situatedness of the novelist as a way of explaining what occurs in the novels of Raymond Williams (1996:101), claims in an analysis of Williams’ *Border Country* (1993):

what is at work here is a crucial ability (attached to the thesis of militant particularism in dialogue with universalising politics) to use what we now call ‘standpoint’.....and location (place) to create a critical space from which to challenge hegemonic discourses (1996:102).

The novels I investigate might illustrate how they could become the “critical space” where women could challenge hegemonic discourse and set up subaltern discourses.<sup>24</sup> Williams’ border country was more than a metaphor since his novels are part of a twentieth century tradition of the national tale. The Irish national tales written by Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, in the early nineteenth century are forerunners of this, with their border country standing for gender as well as nation.<sup>25</sup> As Harvey explicates Williams’ border country:

It was in part an actual material place of refuge..... partially outside of the embrace of overwhelmingly powerful social processes and social relations. This experiential realm underpinned a ‘metaphorical’ point of resistance outside of the language of dominant and hegemonic discourses. Such a location provides a unique point of resistance beyond the reach of some all-embracing and determinate theory, a unique ‘structure of feeling’ outside of external forces of determination. Here was the ultimate refuge of a counter-hegemonic politics..... This was the space from which alternative discourses, politics, imaginaries could emanate (1996:102).

For Harvey, this space was used by Williams as a Welsh writer. I argue that this space afforded possibilities for women writers. In several women’s novels of the period under discussion, there are border countries where women characters can start

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<sup>23</sup> Gillian Rose (1995:336) analyses how three modern women artists, Holzer, Kruger and Sherman have capitalised on the “space-off”, producing works of art that challenge what is traditionally acceptable.

<sup>24</sup> I examine the theoretical context in the final section of this chapter. Of course, women were not the only members of subaltern or counter-public spheres to do this: witness Jacobin novels by male writers such as *Anna St. Ives* (1792) by Thomas Holcroft and *Hermesprong* (1796) by Robert Bage.

<sup>25</sup> I analyse Sydney Owenson’s *Florence McCarthy* (1819) in chapter 2 and *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) in chapter 3.

to stake a claim to their own fields, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology (1993);<sup>26</sup> these border countries are sometimes metaphorical, but often located outside England, for example, in Wales or America.<sup>27</sup> As Harvey argues: "The margin is not simply a metaphor but an imaginary that has real underpinnings" (1996:103). He accepts that these spaces are gendered as well as having the class and national aspects he highlights in Williams' novels. Women used the novel to explore their own position as gendered writers: they were aware that men's theories of art and writing often excluded them as I show in the next section where I analyse eighteenth century theories of aesthetics.

#### 4. The Novel and Eighteenth Century Aesthetics

Problems for women writers arose when they were dealing with the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime in their novels. I would argue that modern aesthetics, as expounded by Hilde Heim, has a pluralism which will help in the reading of women's novels. Heim rejects Kant's theory of pure knowledge because it demands that art must be separate from usefulness and is therefore largely somatophobic and misogynist (1993:3). Women, however, in their novels, saw everyday processes as more important than the grand view. American novelist, Willa Cather, offers readers the possibility of ignoring the ego in her novel, *The Song of the Lark* (1915), where her heroine, Thea Kronborg, comments on Indian women's pottery: "What was any art but an effort to make a sheaf, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining elusive element which is life itself..... The Indian women held it in their jars" (1915:1982:378). For them art was useful. We can see a similar example of a woman writer's conflation of art and usefulness in Dorothy Wordsworth's poem, *Floating Island* (1820:1992:131), where she uses the "floating island" image, which becomes for her, a "peopled world" with birds and insects, and even when it passes, "Yet the lost fragments shall remain,/To fertilize some other ground"; while, for her brother, the image of the floating island, "an amphibious thing/Unsound of spongy texture", is used for a stagnant period in the development of the poet's ego (The

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<sup>26</sup> I analyse Bourdieu's theories of the field in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Alethea Lewis, in *Disobedience* (1799), has her heroine, Mary pass her childhood safely in Wales and finish it safely in America. In between, she faces difficulties particularly from her London-based parents. Marginality is used by bell hooks to show what has happened to black women's voices in the United States. Black women who survive their difficulties, have done so by inventing "spaces of radical openness" which she sees as "a margin – a profound edge" (1991:147).

Prelude:III:340-1:1805:1947).<sup>28</sup> The stark contrast between sister and brother's configuration of the metaphor illustrates clearly how the idea of usefulness is based on gender.

Because eighteenth century aesthetic theory rejected the idea of usefulness, it disabled women from inhabiting the subject position. Joseph Addison's (1712) "man of polite imagination," and David Hume (1757) and Joshua Reynolds' (1797) construction of a universal standard of taste for men involved in the production of civic humanism, all leave women "in the empty space between the signs" or the "space-off," to use terms offered by de Lauretis, referred to in the previous section. Elizabeth Bohls (1995:7) claims that women challenged three aspects of male aesthetic theory: 1) the idea of a generic perceiver, 2) the idea of disinterested contemplation and 3) the idea that the aesthetic domain can be separated from moral, political or utilitarian concerns and activities. My quotations above from Willa Cather and Dorothy Wordsworth are examples of this challenge.<sup>29</sup> Hume's concern is to establish a standard of taste that would be "without reference to our particular interest" (Hume:1757:2001:N.pag.). Similarly, Reynolds claims that what is great in art is able "to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities and details of every kind" (1797:1969:45). These two views immediately strike a contrast with the "militant particularism" of Raymond Williams, which Harvey finds so important (and which I discuss earlier in this chapter). It is an attempt to establish men with leisure and property as the arbiters of taste, which in turn leaves women out, as well as the lower classes or black people. Joseph Addison claims, in the *Spectator*, that the man of polite imagination "is let into a great many pleasures that the vulgar are not capable of receiving." He has a "kind of property in everything he sees" (1712:1748:No.114:73). Whether Addison is referring to intellectual/cultural property rather than economic property, the effect on women is the same: they are not included. The man of polite imagination cannot by definition belong to the lower classes and cannot be female: otherwise women would not need to argue so hard for the right to be educated and considered as rational creatures. Like "the vulgar," they cannot be expected to know how to receive this

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<sup>28</sup> In a slightly different context, but still highlighting the same issue of the gendered male subject being supposedly the universal one, Smollett avoids praising a Pieta because it is essentially a dead male body which he finds repulsive (1766:1981:255); although, earlier, he takes pains to describe the textures of the drapery in a sculpture of a dead woman (1766:1981:217). Since Smollett's wife was with him on this journey, one cannot help wondering how she would have reacted to the two sculptures if she had had the opportunity to write her views.

<sup>29</sup> I return to Bohls' arguments in chapter 6 when I discuss the picturesque and travel writing in novels.

pleasure of the imagination. A very good example of how gaze and property become entwined is Thomas Gainsborough's painting, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1750:National Gallery, London), where Mr Andrews is about to go hunting with his dog across his estate while Mrs Andrews is firmly sitting on the seat, as part of the estate owned by her husband (Rose:1993:91). Women are disenfranchised as subjects because more usually they are the objects of the aesthetic gaze.

Two other areas, where women are disabled as participators in the pleasures of the imagination, are the picturesque and the sublime; the picturesque, as described by William Gilpin (1797:1994),<sup>30</sup> disenfranchises women because he regards the picturesque as something to be generalised into a possible picture which has no room for the utilitarian or even pastoral elements, since it is an aesthetics of disinterestedness (Bohls:1995:98); the sublime, as described by Edmund Burke (1757:1998), leaves women out, because he sees it as something only men can respond to, while women are relegated to the feminine sphere of the beautiful, where they would still be objectified rather than allowed to take up a subject position.

Elizabeth Bohls argues that women could and did speak as aesthetic subjects but they were different in kind from men as subjects: "Boldly entering the space of incongruity between their own concrete social identities and the identity that aesthetic discourse projects for its ideal speaker, they send unpredictable consequences rippling, so to speak, through their texts" (1995:204). They had to "sidestep their objecthood to speak as aesthetic subjects." I explore how far they could "side-step" into the novel to do so, since novels might give them the opportunity to speak about everyday events as aesthetic subjects and not be the objects of the male gaze.<sup>31</sup>

A comparison between women novelists and women painters highlights what some women novelists were trying to achieve. As Linda Nochlin points out, male painters assume they have an absolute right to represent women's bodies as belonging to the men in their paintings, and of course, the artists exercised this right in practice with their models (1988). Nochlin (1988:3) analyses Jacques Louis David's *Oath of Horatii* (1784:Louvre:Paris)<sup>32</sup> where the men are active and the women passive, and

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<sup>30</sup> I analyse Gilpin's viewpoint in more detail in chapter 6.

<sup>31</sup> See my quotations from Barbauld and Reeve in an earlier section above.

<sup>32</sup> See appendix Plate 1.

she asks, in the light of this representation of women, what kind of pictures women artists can paint. She gives an interesting example of a nineteenth century painting, *Nameless and Friendless* (1857:Private Collection) by Emily Mary Osborn, where a woman is taking a painting to a dealer, but where she remains at the mercy of a male art-dealer and voyeuristic male on-lookers.<sup>33</sup> Even well-known women in the field of art might find themselves belittled in the artistic public sphere. Anne Mellor has analysed the work of three female painters at the end of the eighteenth century, Angelika Kauffman, Mary Moser and Mary Cosway (1995:121-42). Kauffman and Moser were both elected to the Royal Academy, but when Johann Zoffany painted members of the Academy (1771-2:Royal Collection: London), the two women were not represented in person in the painting: instead, there are portraits of them placed on the wall, a telling irony when it is remembered that women painters were encouraged to keep to portraits themselves, and to leave landscape and history to the men.<sup>34</sup> Kauffman herself did not have to depend on a female muse to inspire her: instead she represents herself as a “creative genius, exercising originality, professional craftsmanship and rational choice” and equally “the rational capabilities of her subjects” (1995:121-42). Mellor quotes from two of Kauffman’s contemporary male critics, Henry Fuseli and Peter Pindar, to show that they were well aware of her viewpoint, though they were both rather irritated by it. Cosway painted scenes from everyday and domestic life and when she painted from nature she was described as domesticating “the sublime, writing the forest landscape outside her window as Mother Nature caring for her beloved child” (Pindar:cited in Mellor:1995:121-42). Moser showed the same kind of understanding in her illustrations for Mary Robinson’s poems. Once again, these are examples of women not needing to be forced into a private sphere, but using a “space-off” which was for them both private and public at the same time.

Another way of looking at the “space-off” would be to use Anne Mellor’s explanation of Romantic period women, particularly writers, assuming “the stance of the mother-teacher”(1995:20-48). Mellor has shown how women developed a criticism of their own during the Romantic period, which allowed them to explain how they saw the novel as a place for developing their own views about society (1995:20-48). Mellor

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<sup>33</sup> See appendix Plate 2.

<sup>34</sup> See appendix Plate 3.

claims they saw literature as having a “cultural role” which was to “instruct” and therefore they assumed this mother-teacher stance. Mellor extends this argument in her more recent work, *Mothers of the Nation* (2000), where she argues that women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams and Hannah More had a powerful impact on public opinion. The mother-teacher was also an accomplished woman, according to Ann Bermingham who has analysed the “commerce in culture and self-image” in the eighteenth century to show that the “accomplished” woman was as important as the male “connoisseur,” in the effect that consumption had on production (1995:490-512). This fits very well with Griselda Pollock’s arguments (1988), where she rejects the task of feminist art historians as having to recover forgotten women artists. She wants them to leave aside the question of why there are no great women painters, to abandon the attempt at recuperation; to avoid the idea of the individual, great masters, and instead regard production and consumption as on-going economic and cultural activities, in which women play and have played a significant role. The influence of accomplished women may have been strong in the field of art, but in the field of novel-writing their influence was more direct because of the numbers of novels they managed to publish.<sup>35</sup> This may well be why there was more resistance by men to women as writers than women as artists.<sup>36</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield has linked the rise of the novel with the development of consumerism, particularly the connection between women as domestic consumers and women as novel writers and readers (1992:165).

## **5. Theoretical Context of the novel: Public/Private and Cultural Capital**

The words, “public” and “private,” have a range of meanings. Earlier in this chapter, I take public to mean any activity that takes place outside the home; and private, to cover activities within the house or home. In the twenty first century, most people would link public to state and municipal activity, and private with personal or individual endeavour, whether inside the home or in the community. This rather rough and ready division may be inaccurate, for, as Lawrence Klein has warned, binaries are dangerous, because they simplify; they don’t take account of a possible range of distinctions, nor changes in meanings from place to place, or over time; and they

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<sup>35</sup> In Pierre Bourdieu’s sense of the word “field”, they were able to stake out bigger claims.

<sup>36</sup> Carola Hicks in her biography, *Improper Pursuits* (2001), of the artist Lady Di Beauclerk, shows that it was her scandalous sex life that was improper, rather than her art.



ignore the variety of identities within one supposedly homogeneous group (1995:185-107). Klein illustrates his thesis by referring to an article in *The American Weekly Mercury* (1731) by a woman writer, Elizabeth Magawley, who claims that the word “ladies” does not cover a single group: “The word ladies is an ambiguous term to which no single idea can be affixed.” Her argument is made in reply to a suggestion that fools and coxcombs are acceptable to ladies. Not at all, says Magawley, they are not acceptable to all ladies, only to coquets and romps. Thus, eighteenth century critics can be just as sophisticated as modern ones. At the end of his article, Klein refers to fourteen different eighteenth century sources, all using the word “public” in slightly different ways.

These excerpts appear to oppose public and private in the everyday activities of men, in respect of different kinds of law, whoring, business and social gatherings, but not with any reference to gender, except in one excerpt written by a woman, Anne Dutton. She refers to books being “public” because they have been “published”, but then points out that books are mostly read in “private houses”, and this, she argues, means that it is quite compatible with Christian scruples for the writing of that book to have been done by a woman (1743: Klein:1995:106). It would not have been acceptable for a woman to have her writing read out or used for instruction in the “public Assemblies of the Saints.” Dutton’s plea is written as a letter, and from its title, it sounds like a very public letter: *A Letter to Such of the Servants of Christ, Who May Have Any Scruple about the Lawfulness of Printing Any Thing Written by a Woman*, but perhaps Dutton was hoping the “Servants of Christ” would only read it in their homes, and not debate its contents in church gatherings or synods. Although Dutton is concerned with religious writings and not novels, her action, publication, together with her recommendation, private activity, is a model followed by many women novelists.<sup>37</sup>

I would construct the private-public spectrum as follows: at the private end I would place the domestic house, and its accompanying activities and places in which they occur, such as: looking after the home, reading and writing; then visiting gardens, shops, streets, plays, libraries, schools, being published, taking part in charity work

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<sup>37</sup> My reference is to Jane Spencer’s comments in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986), where she claims women novelists carved a public niche for themselves by writing their heroines into the private sphere; Ann Mellor takes issue with this view in *Mothers of the Nation* (2000).

and business with places of employment, and being members of learned societies; then, at the other more public end of the spectrum, there would be the places and activities connected with government, law, universities, church, army, and parliament. The gender differences along the spectrum become increasingly clear: the number of women involved decreases as we look along the spectrum towards the state and government end.

A few aristocratic women, such as Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, actually appeared on the hustings in the 1784 elections (Foreman: 1998:136-60), but most of the time, Georgiana's political activities were confined to meetings held in her own house at Chatsworth, on occasions known as Public Days, and sometimes at local balls (1998:28-9) or at her London house. There is at least one report of a middle-class woman, Anne Plumptre, giving a political speech in the 1790s, but this was considered unusual (McLeod:1996:x).. When Georgiana did write a book, it was a novel, *The Sylph* (1779), published anonymously, and it describes the plight of a middle-class country woman married into the London aristocracy, detailing her domestic and society life with an unloving, unfaithful, gambling husband, reflecting some of Georgiana's own experiences.<sup>38</sup> As Amanda Foreman writes: "Georgiana describes a competitive, unfriendly world peopled predominantly by opportunists, liars and bullies" and she ironically was a "creature" of that world. "However, in publishing *The Sylph* she was also claiming her independence" (1998:61).

Georgiana's heroine, Julia, does not achieve the same kind of independence: she remains firmly in the domestic sphere, her private letters being her only outlet, doing her best to carry out her marriage vows by obeying a more than unpleasant husband, including giving him back, in order to help pay his gambling debts, money that had been settled on her at her marriage (Cavendish:1778: 2001:114). Julia overcomes her difficulties through her own goodness (and repulsion) in the face of sexual temptation, and with the advice given her by a male lover, disguising himself under the pseudonym of the sylph.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the Duchess of Devonshire, she appears to have been more successful in her own later forays into the public sphere than she allows her heroine to be.

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<sup>38</sup> Georgiana wrote this novel when she was in her early twenties: it was a gesture towards a public statement against the aristocratic life she herself led.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 2 where I discuss Ballaster's idea that the female "scriptor" has more power than the female "protagonist" she invents.

Nevertheless, the very act of writing by the author puts the heroine, willing or not, into the public hands of readers. Writing takes place in the house at the private end of the private-public spectrum, but being published is much further along towards the public end of the spectrum, and I would argue that that is probably how most middle class and aristocratic women moved into the public sphere in real life. Lower class women were more visible because of their employment. They were, for example, in coffee houses as proprietors and workers (Ellis:2001:170-52), although it is unlikely that they were taking part in the serious conversations and discussions. However, Markman Ellis argues that the women's influence probably made coffee houses noisy, flirtatious places, and less the polite, civic places, suggested by Habermas.<sup>40</sup> Women certainly travelled and attended all sorts of functions. Elizabeth Pepys, as Klein points out, was present at more than a dozen different kinds of function, from river trips to theatre and tavern visits (1995:185-207).

Over a hundred years later, evidence from the novels I have read, shows women characters across all classes in these kinds of public places, but I see them as nearly always social and private visits, in that they are not directly concerned with business or political matters, or with state or even local community. It is true that there are characters like Cecilia in Burney's novel (1782:1988), who has to visit her financial advisers because she is an orphaned heiress whose inheritance brings with it the difficult condition that her husband must take her name; or Ellis/Juliet in *The Wanderer* (Burney:1814:1991) who has to find work in a milliners because she has no other income. Otherwise, most of the heroines, and they are generally middle class or from the aristocracy, grow up in homes, sometimes go to boarding school, find work as governesses and companions, wait to be married, enter the marital home, look after it, bring up family, attend church, go to balls, plays, gardens, shops and libraries. These heroines may travel, sometimes on holiday, sometimes by force of circumstances, but usually accompanied by a male character, although occasionally alone or with another female character. They meet lower class women who run boarding houses and shops, or who are servants or prostitutes; but the most public occupation they engage in seems to be writing a novel, play or poetry. The writing

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<sup>40</sup> See below where I discuss Habermas' ideas on the growth of the public sphere, which is more about metaphorical space, although he does suggest that real places played their part in its development. Only, middle and upper-class women would be likely to civilise places frequented by men: see my discussion in chapter 6 of the role of women in the Royal Academy exhibitions.

usually takes place in their homes but their intention in the first place is to publish it, or have it put on at a theatre if it is a play.<sup>41</sup> But whatever their intentions, eighteenth century women in real life and in novels always find themselves challenged, if they try to advance too far along the spectrum towards the public end. Women are usually defined by their private roles and relationships, rather than their public ones, where they succeed in establishing them. Stephen Howard has analysed biographies and obituaries of men and women in journals throughout the eighteenth century. He found that while men's obituaries are chronological and recognise their achievements in public life, women's tend to be thematic with most recognition for their achievements as wives and mothers (1997:230-49).<sup>42</sup> Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, suffered the same fate at the hands of her obituary writers, who praised her for her compassion and for setting the tone in fashion. There was no reference to her behind-the-scenes influence in politics, particularly on Whig policy (Foreman: 1998:400-401).

One of the basic premises of this thesis is that the public sphere was only partially available to women, and thus women might be able to use their writing as a way of accessing the public sphere to make their own opinions heard. While many of them were able to write tracts, pamphlets, letters and appeals, others used fiction as a way of promulgating their ideas (Spencer:1986; Kelly:1995; Ballaster:2000;Mellor:2000). Epistolary fiction, according to Clare Connolly, in her introduction to Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies*, "marks out a new space for itself, one somewhere between the public and the private, the logical and the spontaneous" (1993:xxv). However, fiction based on facts and which may be close to faction or documentary, has been used, as well, by many writers who have chosen the novel for its intrinsic possibilities, not because they as writers have been denied access to other forms of writing or public statement.<sup>43</sup> In the case of fiction which has been appropriated by historians,<sup>44</sup> there will inevitably be an overlap of the private with the public.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For example, in the case of writing a play, there is Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* (1777), and in the case of the novel, Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* (1799), which I explore in chapter 2.

<sup>42</sup> He entitles his article, "*A Bright Pattern to All her Sex*," a quotation from one obituary (1997:230-249).

<sup>43</sup> As I point out earlier in this chapter, Raymond Williams is an example of a twentieth century writer who has used fiction and non-fiction in his attempts to examine social issues. David Harvey (1996) as a geographer has subsequently pointed to Williams' novels as, in some respects, a more succinct way of understanding life on an urban estate than the findings of his own statistical research.

<sup>44</sup> See my reference to Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties* earlier in this chapter, note 18.

The concept of a burgeoning public sphere in the eighteenth century was put forward by Jurgen Habermas (1969:1989). It is a complicated idea about which historians and literary researchers are still arguing, not only because of the concept having several possible applications, but also because of the increasing amount of historical evidence that is unveiled every year, some of it reaffirming Habermas' theories, some of it countering his theories with the challenge that Habermas does not make clear whether the public sphere was something that exists(ed) or something more conceptual which can only be used as a label; other critics challenge his theories by positing alternative or counter public spheres, some predating the eighteenth century. Habermas argues that:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour (1969:27).

This passage appears to be positing the public sphere as a conceptual idea, an imaginary arena where bourgeois public opinion could be formed. From this it would follow that the places where people met would ipso facto be places set in the public sphere. Habermas argues that "the line between private and public sphere extended right through the home. The privatised individuals stepped out of the intimacy of their living rooms into the public sphere of the salon, but the one was strictly complementary to the other" (1969:1989:45). In a later attempt at clarification, Habermas defines the public sphere in more detail: "A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (1974:49: cited in Eley 1993). As Geoff Eley comments, the public sphere means "a sphere which mediates between society and state in which the public orders itself as the bearer of public opinion" (1993:290). This explanation sounds very much like John Trenchard's use of "public" and "private," quoted by Klein as an example of the wide range of meanings evident in eighteenth century writings (Klein: 1997:185-207).

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<sup>45</sup> This overlap has been particularly evident in the whole debate about the rights and wrongs and the authenticity of fiction dealing with historical disasters of the magnitude of the trenches in the First World War and the Holocaust (Vice 2000).

What is the Publick, but the collective Body of private Men, as every private Man is a Member of the Publick?...the whole People, by consulting their own Interest, consult the Publick, and act for the Publick by acting for themselves (Cato's *Letters*:1721:3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.London:1733:II,41: cited in Klein).

All of this is very different from a common sense interpretation which would see the public sphere as not only the place where public opinion is formed, but as the arena in which all the political, economic and social activities are carried out by government on behalf of the people it governs. The implications of Habermas' definition for class and for gender are accordingly more complicated. The common sense definition would have allowed us to argue that the lower classes and women did not enter the public sphere, but in Habermas' definition, although the lower classes may be excluded, there is room for the part played by women as they peep out of the "intimacy of their living rooms" and maybe even enter the "public sphere of the salon" (1969:1989:56). On the way to the development of the political public sphere, Habermas suggests there was a literary public sphere, which in turn developed out of the "intimate sphere of the conjugal family" where "privatised individuals viewed themselves as independent even from the private sphere of their economic activity – as persons capable of entering into 'purely human' relations with each other" (1969:1989:56). Habermas argues that the literary form of this was the letter: "through letter-writing the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity." He quotes Christian Gellart, claiming that letters "were to be written in the heart's blood, they practically were to be wept" (1989: 46-7). This led eventually to the printing of letters and then to the epistolary novel.<sup>46</sup>

John Brewer sees Habermas' theory of the public sphere as covering a wider area than is generally allowed for: it entailed, according to Brewer, "to an unprecedented degree, the simultaneous representation of the private domestic world" (1995:344). In fact, I would argue that Habermas does not analyse the private domestic world in the same detail he gives the public world, and Brewer argues in contradistinction to Habermas:

The public sphere is Janus-faced: it seeks to intrude upon matters of state but it also threatens to colonise the domestic sphere.....Indeed we might say that a clearly defined sense of the private or what Habermas calls 'the

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<sup>46</sup> I examine epistolary novels in chapter 3.

intimate' sphere depends symbiotically upon a developed notion of what constitutes the public (1995:44).

Contemporary accounts often bear out Brewer's analysis. Andrew McCann refers to a piece, by James Anderson, from his periodical *The Bee*:

A man after the fatigues of the day are over may thus sit down in the elbow chair; and together with his wife and family, be introduced as it were into a spacious coffee house, which is frequented by men of all nations, who meet together for their mutual entertainment and improvement (Anderson :1740-1:Vol.1:14).

McCann argues that: "The very forms of culture consumption that seem to transgress Habermas' reason-bound public, in fact re-enforce it by consolidating notions of privacy, private pleasure and private consumption as redemptive and ultimately therapeutic" (1999:12). Thus, Habermas' definition of the public sphere needs the private against which to define itself.

According to Brewer, what complicates both the private and the public sphere in the eighteenth century is the importance of pecuniary gain and sexual passion. Culture became a commodity, some of it being both produced and consumed in the private sphere as well as in the public sphere. Brewer illustrates his theory by referring to a character in one of Fielding's plays: in *The Author's Farce* (1737) Dash says to Blotpage: "A title page is to a book, what a fine neck is to a woman, therefore ought to be the most regarded as it is the part which is viewed before the purchase" (Fielding cited in Brewer:1995:349). Brewer argues that culture was on view to the male gaze like a harlot and was similarly purchasable. In this way, private vice became inextricably part of public virtue (1995:349). This meant that women could not have taken part in either private vice or public virtue in the same way as men.

Brewer refers to the development of ideas of culture and taste as defined by critics like Edmund Burke (1757), Archibald Alison (1790) and Alexander Gerard (1759). All three strove to identify culture and taste with politeness, elegance and an avoidance of the vulgar and the gratification of desire. Their problem was to find ways of keeping taste and desire separate and this became increasingly difficult because women were the icons of desire. Thus, women attempting to enter the public sphere by being involved in the production of culture, that is presumably, women

painters, writers, actresses, would inevitably lay themselves open to the charge of being punks or prostitutes. This accusation, according to Brewer, women might “glory in, deny, avoid or subvert” (1995:354). All four of these responses can be seen in the lives of women novelists and very often in the lives of their heroines, although avoidance may be uppermost in the heroines or characters who are also writers themselves as I argue in chapter 2. There are moments when these women characters who are writers, glory in their writing, subvert it for public and/or political ends, but by the end of the novel, they are usually avoiding being seen as writers and even denying their authorship. Ironically, the women authors themselves cannot, by definition, avoid or deny authorship: their authorial interventions range from apology to glorification. They know, as William Godwin made plain, that “Few engines can be more powerful and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature” (cited in Keen:1999:28). Anna Barbauld, as I point out earlier in this chapter, uses the same phrase for the novel: “powerful engine” (1804:viii), although she is referring to novels written by both men and women. One of her contemporaries, Maria Edgeworth, a novelist herself, is keen to see women glorying in their writing: as she writes in her *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), through the appeal of the father defending literature for women, to the father who does not approve of women writing: women are “surely better occupied when they are reading or writing than when they are coquetting or gaming, losing their fortunes or their characters.” Edgeworth has him continue:

You despise the writings of women: - you think they might have made better use of the pen, than to write plays and poetry and romances. Considering the pen was to women a new instrument, I think they have made at least a good use of it as learned men did of the needle some centuries ago when they tried to see how many angels could stand on its point (1795:1993:25).

However, Edgeworth sees the writing power of women remaining in the private sphere:

But you are apprehensive that the desire to govern which women show in domestic life, should obtain a larger field to display itself in public affairs. It seems to me impossible that they can ever acquire the species of direct power which you dread: their influence must be private... (1993:1795:31).

Thus, Edgeworth argues there is no danger in writing women entering the literary public sphere, since their influence would be private. James Burgh, however, a Scottish schoolmaster, writing much earlier in 1746, was someone who saw danger in



their literary and musical activities, even in private. He addressed the women of Britain who indulged in too much pleasure of the imagination: “Can you say you ever come away from the tumultuous scenes of Pleasure...without having your Minds disturbed?...The most melting strains of music, and of the most rapturous and passionate flights of poetry” will fill your “fancies with romantic wishes” and would therefore result in making their homes dull to them (cited in Brewer:1995:355). Paul Keen (1996:66) refers to T.J. Mathias, who in his satirical piece, *The Pursuits of Literature or What you Will* (1797), is worried about women meddling in politics: “Our unsexed female writers now instruct or confuse us and themselves in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy” (Mathias:1798:238). However, Keen points to “the diverse ways that women writers implicitly revised, rather than directly challenged established cultural assumptions, by encoding subversive arguments about sexual politics within accepted literary genres and styles” (1999:173-4). In other words, they were able to make comments about issues to do with the public sphere within the form of the more privately-based novel.

Nevertheless, public spaces, whether literal or metaphorical, remained dangerous places for women. We have only to look at words like *streetwalker* to see the implications for women who walked out alone (Decker:2000:1-24). It took Burney’s *Evelina* an unpleasant experience in Ranelagh to realise that women on their own were more than likely prostitutes (Burney:1778),<sup>47</sup> and Burney continued the theme of the woman who had lost her domestic/home sphere in *The Wanderer* (1814). Decker analyses novels by men and women from the 1790s to show that there are seven ideological positions that women characters appearing in public places might find themselves in. The first is the misogynist/libertine view that women are fair play because all they want anyway is power, money and sex. The second is the chivalric/quixotic, which sees all women as morally good. The third, Decker calls the traditional patriarchal, which allows for the possibility of women being virtuous. The fourth is an extension of this, which she calls the fashionable patriarchal, where women are acceptable if they pretend virtue. The fifth is the sentimental where women in public spaces are responded to emotionally and so they may be good or

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<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Burney makes it clear that *Evelina* was safer with the women who were prostitutes than she might have been if she had approached two unknown men.

bad. The sixth is the internalised/reformed patriarchal where women can take precautions about their appearance in public. The seventh is the feminist where it is expected that both genders should follow the same code. Analysing the seven ideological positions, it seems that the first six are likely to be adopted by men, although women may consciously or unconsciously, subscribe to them as well. Decker, in fact, argues that Amelia Opie, in her novel, *The Father and Daughter* (1800), leaves her heroine in a position where she submits to patriarchal assumptions adopted by men in the sixth ideological position. To take examples from *Evelina* (1778) by Fanny Burney, the first view would have been held by her libertine characters like Sir Clement Willoughby. Burney's hero, Lord Orville, would probably fall into the third or fourth category. Burney would have seen many of her male characters behaving as befits categories five and six, while category seven is the one for which women novelists, like Fanny Burney herself, Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft, were continually making a plea. Apart from the last of these ideological positions, whichever of the other six are analysed, and regardless of the gender of the author, women in public spaces in the novel, according to Decker, were treated differently from men. Only the seventh category asks for men and women to be judged by the same codes of behaviour.

The career of Anna Barbauld as an author exemplifies the problems that Decker's seven ideological positions might offer women in real life. Harriet Guest (2000:46-68) has analysed Anna Barbauld's life to illustrate the difficulties of women who openly entered the public sphere. Barbauld taught at the Warrington Academy, wrote political poetry, and entered the debate on education and rights for women, on slavery, and many other topical issues at the end of the eighteenth century. But she endangered her own position as virtuous woman in doing so, and in her poetry and other writing indicated that whatever she had done, it was not what she would encourage other women to do. Guest points out that Mary Wollstonecraft criticised Barbauld for her poem, *To a Lady with some painted Flowers* (Barbauld:1773: 2002: 94), particularly the lines: "No blush, my fair, to own you copy these/Your best, your sweetest empire is – to please." Wollstonecraft comments: "So the men tell us; but virtue, says reason, must be acquired by rough toils and useful struggles with worldly cares" (1792:1992:144). For Wollstonecraft, women must, it seems, struggle in the public sphere, which is what Barbauld did, although she did not recommend it for

other women. On the other hand, she was criticised in the *Monthly Review* for sounding too much like a man: “We hoped the woman was going to appear, and that while we admired the genius and learning of her graver compositions, we should be affected by the sensibility and passion of the softer pieces” (cited in Guest:1994:49). Barbauld must have been concerned for, in a letter to Elizabeth Montagu, she wrote that she had “stepped out of bounds of female reserve in becoming an author,” and added that her “situation had been peculiar and would be no rule to others” (Guest:2000:52). That issue of being in an unsuitable space/place for women, “out of bounds,” appears again in her poem addressed to her brother, Dr Aiken, written in 1768. In this poem, she describes how she herself and her brother were brought up in the same way at first but that then her brother became a doctor going on to “nobler labours of a manly mind,” while she went to “more humble works and lower cares”. Although their minds were not stamped in “different moulds,” she admonishes herself not “to strive to soar too high” but to be happy to remain “within thy bounded sphere” (1768:2002:55-6). Guest points out, however, that there was one part of the public sphere where Barbauld felt all sections of society could come together and that was the religious public sphere. “The temple is the only place where human beings of every rank, sex and age, meet together for one common purpose and join together in one common act” (Barbauld:1792:cited in Guest:2000:57). However, the common act does not necessarily include delivering sermons, although it might do in Dissenting churches.

If women were in danger as cultural producers, and by implication this means they were in the public sphere, they were certainly heavily involved in cultural consumption. Terry Lovell argues that “commodity literature is consumed in private and women are in the private, domestic sphere” (1995:23-41). The masculine world might be able to keep an eye on production, though even that is doubtful, but they certainly could not control consumption. The very fact that the journals of the public sphere spent so much time and space advising and bullying their readers, who were presumably sitting at home in their domestic spaces, about what they should be reading, is ample evidence that women (and men) readers were reading what they

wanted to read (Donaghue: 1995: 54-74).<sup>48</sup> To extend Brewer's metaphor – the Janus face of the public sphere that looked towards the domestic sphere seems to have been less influential (and that may be why Habermas largely ignores it), than the face that looked towards government, institutions and the economy.<sup>49</sup> The domestic sphere, where novels were written and read, was the site where women could make their own claims for control. Ann Bermingham rejects Habermas' theory of the public sphere because he more or less takes the private sphere for granted, and Bermingham welcomes instead the possibility of overturning the notion of an essential self, which will then allow explorations of ethnic and feminist identity. She thinks Pierre Bourdieu's ideas are more useful than those of Habermas, but her acceptance of Bourdieu is modified, since she claims his theory of cultural capital is a top-down model, that cannot explain what is occurring at the lower levels of society (Bermingham:1995:12). However, I would argue that in spite of this criticism of Bourdieu, his theories afford a way of examining the role of novel-writing in the lives of women at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly his theory of the habitus and field, together with his theories of cultural capital and symbolic violence. Bourdieu's explanation for why people behave in the way they do lies in the habitus which he claims is a "system of dispositions." The disposition "expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination"(1977:214). These dispositions, argues Bourdieu, are the product of:

a struggle which has gone on unceasingly, from the seventeenth century to the present day, between groups differing in their ideas of culture and of the legitimate relation to culture and to works of art, and therefore differing in the conditions of acquisition (1984:2).

Bourdieu refers to a cultural nobility which has a stake in this struggle and is able to accumulate cultural capital because they are in possession of the code which makes it possible. The implication here is a class one, since Bourdieu uses the term "nobility," but any one social group is unlikely to be homogeneous, as Elizabeth Magawley,

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<sup>48</sup> Between 1789 and 1799 *The Lady's Magazine* has over twenty letters and articles about what women should or should not be reading. I refer to some of these in chapter 4.

<sup>49</sup> I examine issues of women and reading in more detail in chapter 4.

referred to at the beginning of this chapter, realised: a cultural nobility will contain both men and women with differing ideas of culture and its acquisition.

Society, Bourdieu argues, consists of inter-related fields. He does not make clear whether these fields exist or whether they are analytical constructs. Some of the fields seem to depend on content: Bourdieu refers to philosophy and geography fields (1993:72) but later refers to the intellectual field. He ignores, even more than Habermas, the questions of ethnicity and gender, so it is not clear whether there is a feminine field that might cut across the intellectual field, for example. It does seem that, according to his theory, women would need their own field, since he argues that:

In order for a field to function there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on (1993:73).

On the other hand, since there is always a power struggle in the field, it might be that women are usually the ones who need to challenge the ownership of “the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies” (1993:73). Bourdieu refers to the challengers as newcomers to the field, implying they will often be the younger generation, and again he makes no reference to gender (1993:110). It could be that women at the end of the eighteenth century were staking their claim to cultural capital through the novel.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of women staking their claim for cultural capital through the novel seems to fit in with the historical and literary evidence provided by the novels they wrote. Many women, however, stayed within their “bounded sphere,” not only voluntarily but because of what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic violence (1977:190-7). In this scenario, those with dominant power or authority at any one point in their field use the education system to make sure the rest of society accept their hegemony without feeling dispossessed by it. Bourdieu sees this happening in terms of class rather than in terms of gender. As far as the novel goes, Bourdieu’s theories would explain what happened in the second decade of the nineteenth century when Walter Scott’s entry

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<sup>50</sup> Sometimes recommended reading for women includes novels, sometimes novels are slated as dangerous, and history and other works of non-fiction are recommended instead. I explore these issues in chapter 2 on the writing of novels within novels, and also in chapter 4 on women’s recommended reading.

into the field of novel-writing wrested away the cultural capital invested and gained by women over the previous two decades.<sup>51</sup>

The same lack of interest in gender is apparent when Bourdieu discusses taste.

“Tastes, defined as the sets of choices made by particular persons, are the product of an encounter between the objectified taste of the artist and the taste of the consumer” (1993:110). Sometimes the artist is more concerned with a fellow artist than with the consumer. Here, Bourdieu cites the case of the critic of *Le Figaro* who “writes not with his eyes on his public but with reference to the critic of the *Nouvel Observateur*” (1993:110). We could cite as well the case of the critics who wrote for *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* in the 1760s who were more concerned with answering each other’s criticisms than with helping their readers to get some idea of the books they were critiquing (Donaghue:1993:66). As a result, Bourdieu argues, the artistic field is the site of continual partial revolutions. At this point, he seems to dispense with the consumer altogether, attacking Marxists, such as George Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann, for putting art in the context of society when it is the nature of the artistic field to produce great artists. He claims that the interaction between artists is more important than the reception of the art, although he does relent enough to claim that the artistic field contains critics, gallery directors and patrons as well as the artists (1993:140). I would argue that there must be a point where the habitus of the artist is influenced by the reception of the work of art: writers need readers but perhaps, readers are in a different field. Bourdieu’s elitist, masculinist attitude is made even more apparent when he argues that public opinion does not exist because to exist it would need three propositions which he claims are not true: 1) that everyone can have an opinion; 2) that all opinions are of equal worth; and 3) that the questions that seek public opinion are agreed by everyone (1993:149). A belief in the existence of a cultural nobility implies that there are some who do not belong to the cultural nobility. Those who are not noble enough will be not be able to form opinions, and amongst those who do, some opinions will have more cultural worth than others.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, if it is believed that the questions that seek public opinion are not agreed by everyone, then there is the possibility that counter and

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<sup>51</sup> Garside’s statistics, referred to earlier in this chapter, show a striking falling off in the number of novels published by women after 1811.

<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu’s analysis is like Addison’s reference to the man of polite imagination.

subaltern public opinions might exist. These would be the fields where women could begin to stake their claims to cultural capital. In the next chapter I examine novels where one of the women characters is herself a writer. I explore how far this is an area where women could pre-eminently build their stocks of cultural capital.

## Chapter 2: Women Writers and their Writing Heroines

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine novels written by women where there are women characters who are writers. I explain in chapter 1, that the novel might be the space where women could access the public sphere in a way that allowed them to make their voices heard without having to appear in public in person. I argue the case for the novel being a particularly relevant form of writing for women since it covers a wide range of aspects of life and society in a more open-ended way than overtly political or philosophical writings. It allows women that “militant particularism” which David Harvey and Raymond Williams as sociologists find so useful. I therefore explore how far women novelists could make use of their female characters who write as a possible way of defending their own position as writers: they might use their female characters to allow themselves as writers a certain freedom, while allowing their characters less freedom.

Ros Ballaster claims that the woman writer hides behind the fictional woman in the book she writes. The female protagonist often has to look for a male protector but “by contrast her author evades the need for a male protector precisely because the novel allows her to enter a form of authoritative discourse without the risk of physical display of her own proper body (the heroine stands as surrogate)” (2000:198). Of course, women writers did need to say things about writing more directly, and this they often did in the prefaces to their books. It seems to me, that at this point, they were shaking off their “nobodiness”, a phrase coined by Catherine Gallagher (1994:xx). Once women writers make a statement in a preface, they have moved from what Ballaster calls “the exercise of authority in invisible, private economies of writing and knowledge,” and have come closer to “acts of public utterance” (2000:202).<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to recognise the secondariness, as Ballaster calls the position of women writers. Overall she sees the female “scriptor” (Ballaster’s term for the narrator) as having more power than the female reader or the female protagonist:

Domestic authority and the power as a woman to engage, rather than find herself the circulating object, in commodity culture, lies ultimately only with the female narrator who retains the organising and interpretative power over the story even as she retains her anonymity and physical distance from the action (2000:209).

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<sup>1</sup> I analyse this in chapter 4 on prefaces.



To emphasise this, Ballaster refers to “the act of representation itself, the act of narration” as being “the only place for the imitation of masculine mastery without personal cost for women” (2000:209-10). Ballaster claims that it is the novel’s “hybrid status between public and private modes of discourse,” that gave women a place for speaking, which was denied them elsewhere (2000:214). As a way of testing how far society saw women in this position at the time, I move on in section 2 of this chapter, to survey comments in *The Lady’s Magazine* about women as writers between 1789 and 1815.<sup>2</sup> From this analysis, the two opposing concepts of “admiration” for women as writers and “esteem” for women as women emerge as touchstones for women writers.<sup>3</sup>

Then in section 3, using Virginia Woolf’s (1931) suggestion that women writers of the 1930s needed to think of themselves as writing through their mothers, I refer to the literary mothers of the women characters who write in novels produced at the end of the eighteenth century, and this leads back to Jane Barker a century earlier. The history of women novelists and writers inscribing themselves in their own writing is a long one, although it may not be a widespread one. Virginia Woolf not only coined the phrase “a room of one’s own”, but also “a woman writing thinks back through her mothers” (1931:146). Thus, Woolf regarded Aphra Behn as a role model for women writers in the 1930s (1931:95). Tracing the history of some of the fictional writing-mothers within the novel itself, it might be that the room or lack of it becomes a significant part of the structure of the novel itself. Sometimes the room is there in the sense that the women characters are confined to the domestic sphere in a way they may not want to be: they may, for example, be prisoners in their own homes and be denied access to writing materials.<sup>4</sup> An important influence on women writers, enabling them to depict their heroines as writers, is Samuel Richardson’s novel, *Pamela* (1740).<sup>5</sup>

In section 4, I explore novels where the heroine is a writer: *The Natural Daughter* (1799) by Mary Robinson, *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) by Amelia Opie, *Husband Hunters!* (1816) by Amelia Beauclerc, and *Florence McCarthy* (1826) by Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan. It could be that this strategy would enable the woman novelist

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<sup>2</sup> *The Lady’s Magazine* ran from 1770 till 1835, and while not being an overtly literary critical magazine, nevertheless concerned itself with women as readers and writers.

<sup>3</sup> The defence of the novel by women made in the prefaces to their novels is discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> The implication is often that they should be using a needle rather than a pen. This is evident in Jane Barker’s *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1713) for example.

<sup>5</sup> *Pamela* herself is a letter-writer, not a writer of novels, so, in some ways, has more relevance for the employment of the epistolary form discussed in chapter 3.

of the period under discussion to follow the example set by Jane Barker earlier in the century, and, as Ballaster suggests, empower the female scriptor in a society not fully prepared to accept female authors: scriptor and heroine might be able to lay equal claim to admiration and esteem. Finally, in section 5, I explore examples of an extreme form of the heroine who uses words, not writing them in a novel, but performing them in public, the improvisatrice: Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1805), and two English novels which include an improvisatrice-heroine, Mrs Foster's *The Corinna of England* (1809) and Anne Harding's *The Refugees* (1822). I explore how far these novelists either celebrate or denounce their writing-characters in view of the fact that the general climate was against women writers; both the women writers themselves and their supporters had to continually plead for their acceptance. Their struggle to be recognised as writers is vividly illustrated by the analysis of *The Lady's Magazine* in section 2.

## **2. *The Lady's Magazine* as both Support System and Detractor of Women Writers**

*The Lady's Magazine* prided itself on being a place where women writers could be published and, of course, where women readers could read what had been published.<sup>6</sup> The editors reflect, however, the concerns of polite society about the place of reading and writing women within that society. This was not an issue new to the 1790s, the debate had been going on throughout the century. As Kathryn Shevelow claims: "The early periodical was one of the principal linguistic sites for the production of a new ideology of femininity and the family" (1989:3). She refers to periodicals produced by among others, John Dunton, Peter Motteux, and Richard Steele and Joseph Addison. She shows that even the early periodicals were concerned not only with women as readers but also with women as writing subjects, and she explains how it was the format of these periodicals together with the intentions of the editors, usually male, which led to a correspondence between reader and editor. In this way, she argues, women became writers almost unintentionally, and the public and private spheres were brought together. As she points out:

The periodical figured women's natural place within the private realm by representing them in print, not only as idealized domestic figures but also, to some degree, as writing subjects of their own discourse, published as a discourse of private life. By the very means of its production, then, the discourse of the private is a public discourse(1989:15).

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<sup>6</sup> Already published authors, who are represented by extracts from their novels, include Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald, Elizabeth Hamilton, Amelia Opie and Mary Hays. Most of the authors who have a whole novel printed are referred to as "by a lady"; named ones include Elizabeth Yeames (1805) and Sophia Troughton (1806 and 1807).

Shevelow's argument explains how women find a passageway from the domestic sphere to the public sphere through publishing their writing.

One of the earliest periodicals, Dunton's *The Athenian Mercury*, which started in 1691, published women's letters. Shevelow traces the development of these women's letters which gradually become stories of their own lives: "the double construction of the subject in *The Athenian Mercury* suggests the terms on which women gained increasing access to self-representation in the eighteenth century" (1989:91). *The Tatler* and *Spectator* subsumed women's letters into the editorial voice, but the invention of the Jenny Distaff character in *The Tatler* gave women a voice, even if at a second remove and unmistakably domestic (1989:99). Women were able to find an outlet in Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, started in 1721 (Adburgham:1972), whose purpose was to "treasure up as in a magazine, the most remarkable pieces of writing and news culled from the press" (cited in Adburgham:1972:79), and there was an obviously female readership in mind since these treasures included conundrums and cookery recipes.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, women writers such as Eliza Haywood in the *Female Spectator*, started in 1744, and Charlotte Lennox in the *Lady's Museum*, started in 1760, opened the way for periodicals directed by and at women readers. Neither of these ran for more than a few years, and there were simultaneous attempts by men to fill the demands of women readers and writers for which periodicals were both the cause and effect. *The Lady's Magazine* which I analyse for the period after 1790 started publication in 1770 and ran with various modifications until 1835. The original owner was a man but it is not always clear whether editorials or even letters are written by men or women.

The first edition (1770) makes plain the purposes of the editors and is clearly a male viewpoint since it refers to "your sex" rather than "our sex". Improvement would lead to admiration, as is made plain in a later edition, while, if women indulged only in amusement and delight, they would be more likely to attract the esteem of the opposite sex. "The subjects we shall treat of are those that may tend to render your minds not less amiable than your persons." This would be achieved by offering women readers:

interesting stories, novels, tales, and romances, intended to confirm Chastity and recommend virtue...and a lady of some eminence in the literary world has promised to enrich our collection with a sentimental journey, during her

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<sup>7</sup> This was the first time the word magazine, in its original meaning of a store of ammunition, was used metaphorically to describe a store of different kinds of writing.

progress through this kingdom; and as she intends after she has completed her tour of this island, to extend her travels to the continent, we doubt not, but her article will be as entertaining to the imagination, as it will be instructive to the understanding (Preface:August:1770:N.pag.).

As I argue later, that might make her more admired than esteemed.

Indeed, other periodicals besides *The Lady's Magazine* are concerned with the continuing problems faced by women writers. *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, for example, in June 1799, having attacked Sir Walter Scott for taking too much of the limelight and begged notice for women writers, describes the problem facing them as both women and writers:

However rapid may be her mind, or her movements, her hands will not, at the same moment, correct a proof and mend her stockings. She has all the common cares of life to meet, together with the accumulated load of the sorrow she must invent, must dwell upon must lament - in order that her readers may feel for an hour, what she has felt for a year. .... With a perpetual hurry on her mind, she must yet ensure hours for calm cogitation, half days of quietness, and nights in which the repose demanded by weary nature must be sacrificed to the necessity of writing or thinking in an uninterrupted tranquillity (cited in Adburgham: 1799: 1972:215).

Women are expected to find time to be both feminine and learned and hope not to offend the opposite sex in the process. *The Lady's Magazine* is one among many periodicals engaging in the difficult terrain, both public and private, where women strive to become readers and writers. In 1790, the preface claims: "Days are past when learning in a woman was accounted miraculous" (Preface:1790:N.pag.). In February 1789, readers are given "Hints on Reading" which claims:

Books are heaped upon the world not in small quantities but in multitudes, writers of books do not deal them out sparingly but in heaps; and the larger our libraries are, the greater the impossibility of knowing what they consist of. It is a happy revolution in the history of the fair sex that they are now in general readers, and what is better thinkers, too, which adds charms to their conversation that outlive those of mere beauty. The present age prides itself justly on many excellent female writers which it possesses but all ladies are readers (February 1789:79-81).

Here, the writer of "Hints on Reading" is worried about what the increasingly literate women are going to be reading. The implication is that, although the present age prides itself on its many excellent female writers, it is also frightened about what its less than excellent female writers may be producing for the libraries. In June of the same year, a writer with the signature, The Trifler, and from the tone of the article, a man writes: "No age has been more distinguished by the learning of its women than the eighteenth

century. It must be confessed that many female pens are wielded with an ability that would by no means discredit the most enlightened understanding.” Then to prove that he is damning with faint praise, the writer continues: “But we admire them more as authors than esteem them as women” (June 1789:297). It is clear women cannot be modest and authors at the same time, and this is made apparent in the following sections of this chapter where I analyse the novels with women characters who are writers. It seems that the act of writing itself is a step into the public sphere where The Trifler thinks women lose their femininity.

The Trifler, in this instance, thinks that poetry and novel-writing are acceptable for women, but it is their involvement in classical knowledge that he “would wish to withhold.” It might be the new philosophy of the French Revolution that he is really frightened of, but he mocks women generally by claiming that the logical conclusion to women studying Greek and Latin might be “Westminster School a female academy, or eventually sweepstakes rode by women” (June 1789:297). This last improbable eventuality seems to imply an irrational fear of something more real that he does not actually want to mention. Meanwhile, the editors are not entirely in agreement with The Trifler. The preface for 1792 claims that the majority of women “will ever prefer solid and instructive literature to that superficial and frivolous reading which can convey no information, nor even afford entertainment, but an uncultivated or a vitiated taste,” so they will continue to give their readers “History, Geography, Antiquities, Criticism and the whole circle of Polite Literature” (Preface:1792:N. pag.). In the event, they give their readers a great many romantic novels as well.

This particular preface does not refer to women writers but the preface for 1794 is openly concerned with the part played by *The Lady's Magazine* in allowing women access to knowledge:

But as the ascent to the Temple of Science has been found steep and difficult, the male sex, as best adapted to laborious exercises, both of body and mind, for a long time imagined they possessed the exclusive privilege of entering it. In the present age, however, many of the fair and more amiable sex have preferred claims to the same honours, and appropriated to themselves the noble advantages which result from a diligent cultivation of the faculties of the mind (Preface:1794:N. pag.).

It is at this point, that the editors make clear that one of their aims is to “cherish modest genius” (Preface:1794:N.pag.). It seems that if the genius is modest then women

writers can be both admired and esteemed; or to explain it in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1993), women are being encouraged to stake out a claim to a "modest" area of the writing field.<sup>8</sup> I presume that their use of "modest" refers to propriety rather than volume. However, if women accept that modest genius is all they want, then they are victims of the symbolic violence male society is inflicting on them.

The preface for 1798 announces similar intentions to the 1794 preface. The editors want "to combine amusement with instruction and to cherish and direct the development of female genius by affording a repository for the preservation of its earlier essays or its more mature productions" (Preface:1798:N. pag.). The preface for 1806 makes wider claims. *The Lady's Magazine*, they state, is a "useful and elegant repository of such productions of genius especially of the female sex, as might otherwise have been neglected or lost" (Preface:1806:N. pag.). Here they are concerned for women as writers as well as readers. However, they still hedge these claims with promises that they will not include "whatever might have the slightest tendency to that indelicacy which must above all things be offensive to a modest and cultivated female mind" (Preface:1806:N. pag.). This shows they are worried about the danger of women writers forfeiting their esteem as women. In 1808 they are even more aware of their part in promoting women's writing. They argue that *The Lady's Magazine* is an "asylum for the fugitive pieces produced by female genius whether in its first dawn, or when arrived at more perfect maturity; and with many of these of very considerable merit, it has occasionally been honoured. Of this the novels now publishing in it from time to time, all of which are the production of ingenious ladies are a sufficient proof" (Preface:1808:N. pag.). The editors are true to their word: each month there is an instalment from a novel by a new writer who has probably not been published before. They also find a place for extracts from the novels of already published women writers. These include selections from *Desmond* (1792) by Charlotte Smith (July 1792:413), the part where Smith wishes the nobility would do good rather than be inimical to "the general rights of mankind"; the pilgrim's story from *Vancenza* (1792) by Mary Robinson (October 1793:537); from *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) by Mary Hays, part of the novel where Emma refuses to justify herself to Mr and Mrs Morton on whether she will write to Mr Francis (April 1797:153); and from *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) by Elizabeth Hamilton where the Rajah compares the protection given by Hindoos and Muslims to their slaves with the brutality meted out by "these white

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<sup>8</sup> I discuss Bourdieu's ideas of the field in chapter 1.

savages” (August 1796:364); and his comment on the education of English females who are taught “monkeys’ tricks” instead of being educated through their intellectual faculties (October 1796:453); and in 1808 an extract from *Corinna or Italy* (1805) by Madame de Stael, where Corinne and Lord Nelvil go to St. Peters (February 1808:64). It seems that the editors have taken pains to find radical selections from radical women writers, and mostly within a few months of the original publication. In spite of the radical nature of some of this writing, they presumably do not think any of it “offensive to a modest and cultivated female mind” (Preface:1806:N. pag.).

There are also extracts from Elizabeth Inchbald’s novels and plays and glowing reviews given to her work generally. In February 1791, a reviewer writes of *A Simple Story* (1791): “It is but seldom that we notice performances under the title of novels, unless indeed we can discover in them a tendency which we can approve, or find them holding forth an example which we can recommend” but Mrs Inchbald has “accurate knowledge of the human heart” (February 1791:59). However, this reviewer cannot refrain from issuing a warning to other hopeful women novelists:

And here, bye the bye, we would beg leave to say to such of our readers as have felt an itch for novel-writing, that they are exceedingly much to blame in storing their memories with the incidents and characters of other writers, since an examination of their own heart, and an observation of others in real life, will not only furnish them with what is new and interesting, but convince them that the human heart is an exhaustless fund, from whence the novelists and poet, the philosopher and the moralist, may always draw scenes that have never been claimed before (February 1791:59).

It may be that this reviewer is simply demanding a fresh approach from writers, but the phrase “an itch for novel-writing” seems to belittle women novelists and suggest that many of them write inadequate novels which copy the work of other writers.

In much the same tone, in April 1796 there is a review recommending Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* (1796) with a veiled criticism of the Minerva Press for not always publishing works as good as Inchbald’s. The reviewer claims that Inchbald’s tale is “widely different from the barren narratives which from time to time issue from the press, not even excepting that press which takes its name from, and no doubt is under the sacred guardianship of, Minerva herself” (April 1796:168). To prove the point of how good Inchbald is, the reviewer quotes a section from the book where Inchbald satirises poverty through Henry’s naïve questions. The reviewer appears to be a woman since it is signed Eliz. L. It is clear, therefore, that over the years *The Lady’s Magazine*

is concerned not only with novel-writing as genre, but also with the quality of that writing. As an example of this concern, in June 1792 the magazine prints a “Scale of Female Literary Merit.” They claim to have been sent it by an anonymous correspondent and, while approving of it in general, do not want “to be considered as responsible for every particular estimate” (June 1792:290).<sup>9</sup> Fourteen women writers, who include novelists and poets, are placed on a scale from 0 to 20 on seven characteristics: Sentiment, Imagery, Animation, Strength, Harmony, Feeling and Originality.

The issue of women writers being admired as authors rather than esteemed as women, as the Trifler puts it in 1789, seems to affect the way women structure the plots of their novels about women writers. Nearly all the novels I have read end with the women writers relinquishing or restricting their writing when they marry, or alternatively, not marrying at all. It seems that the real-life authors were able to write more effectively than their fictional creations. From this evidence, I would take issue with Ballaster, referred to above, when she says the female protagonist has to look for a male protector, but on the other hand her author does not need a male protector because she has the discourse of the novel (2000:198). If that discourse, however, destroys the female protagonist’s life as a writer, then I would argue that the value of the discourse is limited. The message ought to be as convincing as the medium, and it only seems to be so when the author intervenes in her own narrative to appeal directly to the reader in opposition to what the narrative is saying. However, there is an example of a woman heroine who continues to write after marriage and that is one created by a male author, Samuel Richardson’s eponymous heroine in *Pamela* (1740), which I examine in the next section.

### **3. Writers in the Novel: admiration or esteem in Richardson, Barker and Lennox**

*Pamela* may be one of the few female protagonists from the middle of the century who continues to write after marriage, but, of course, *Pamela* has not been writing novels, except in as much as her own letters and journals make the novel that Richardson is writing. Nevertheless, within the novel, her sister-in-law claims that *Pamela*’s story has made readers of all the family. “This itch of scribbling has been a charming help,” Lady Davers writes to *Pamela*, and adds that *Pamela* has been “flint and steel too, as I may say, to yourself” (1740:1969:Vol.II:33). She points out that because of her reading and

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix Figure1:9.



writing “everything you heard became your own.” She tells Pamela: “your correspondence may revive the poetical ideas I used to have before I entered the drowsy married life .....for already you have made us a family of writers and readers” (1740:1969:Vol.II:34).

Furthermore, Pamela’s husband does not share The Trifler’s point of view, nor does he allow Pamela to suffer in the way Elvira, a correspondent of *The Lady’s Magazine*, does over half a century later, when she complains that men put women who write and read in an impossible position (March 1808:110).<sup>10</sup> Pamela explains in one of her letters: “For my dear friend permits me to rise an hour sooner than usual, that I may have time to scribble; for he is always pleased to see me so employed, or in reading; often saying when I am at my needle: ‘Your maids can do this Pamela; but they cannot write as you can’” (1740:1969:Vol.II:90). On another occasion, Pamela writes to Lady Davers relating how, while Mr B.’s mother was still alive, he saw her commonplace book full of her writing: “ ‘A method, I take it, my dear, (turning to me) of great service to you, as it initiated you into writing with that freedom and ease which shine in your saucy letters and journals; and to which my present fetters are not a little owing’” (1740:1969:Vol.II:109). However, Richardson/Mr B share some of later male and female writers’ concerns with romances. Mr B. encourages Pamela in writing a commentary on John Locke’s ideas on education, and he gives Pamela the chance to comment on romance writers by actually parodying their style as a warning to a young woman who has been reading too many romances. Writing, Pamela tells Miss Stapylton, should be “plain, simple, easy and unaffected” (1740:1969:Vol.II:441). Richardson’s novel ends with Pamela telling stories to her children, explaining that her adopted daughter, Miss Goodwin, would transcribe them. In fact, the narrative of the story-telling is written by Pamela in a letter to a friend, Lady G. (1740:1969:Vol.II:464-71). Pamela seems to receive both admiration and esteem.

It may well be that Richardson knew the work of Jane Barker who had already written more than one novel with a woman author as her main character. Barker solves her protagonist’s (which was also her own) dilemma by making her remain single. She protects her virginity in order to protect herself as a writer: Richardson, by contrast, has Pamela writing in order to protect her virginity, and then allows her to continue writing after marriage. Jane Barker often uses a double layering in the narration by having,

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<sup>10</sup> I include a more detailed reference to this in chapter 5

both herself as author and one of her characters, share the narration of the story. The important issue here is that the narrating character is a writer just like the author. This conflation of narrator-writer and author-writer appears, not frequently but regularly, throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

In Barker's *The History of the Amours and Love Intrigues of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713), the heroine, Galesia, turns to writing and study as a result of disappointment in love: "I resolved to espouse a book, and spend my days in study...I imagined myself the Orinda or Sapho of my time" (1713:15). Here, she is searching for her own literary mothers, both recent and more ancient. Her brother becomes her tutor teaching her grammar, although when her lover, Bosvil, appears in her life again, she complains:

My grammar rules now became harsh impertinences for I thought I had learned amo and amor by a shorter and surer method; and the only syntax I studied was how to make suitable answers to my father, and him, when the longed-for question should be proposed" (1713:21).

Indeed, the contrast between being in love and authorship and the compatibility or incompatibility of authorship and marriage, remains one of the central themes in all the books where the narrator-writer and author-writer are conflated. To begin with, Galesia deals with her disappointment in love by writing a sonnet about it. Gradually, however, Galesia makes clear that writing becomes more important for her. She has a dream in which "an angry power carried me away and made me climb a high mountain where I met Bosvil who endeavoured to throw me down, but I thought the same power snatched me away and brought me to a high mountain" where "I seemed to prefer the muses and a studious life before that of marriage and business" (1713:32 and 1736:167). To make her point quite clear she continues in verse: "Since thou hast the muses chose/Hymen and Fortune are thy foes" (1713:34). As a writer, she has to fight off those who want to marry her or encourage her to marry.

Later, she wishes there was somewhere in England like a convent, where she could do her writing in peace – a pre-echo of Woolf's desire for a room of one's own.

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<sup>11</sup> There seems to be a thread running from Jane Barker's Galesia, through Charlotte Lennox's Harriot Stewart, through Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray, through Amelia Beauclerc's Louisa Mortimer, as far as Sydney Owenson's Florence McCarthy and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh; and in the States, Fanny Fern's Ruth Hill, and Louisa M. Alcott's Beth.

Nevertheless, she is worried about spending her time in writing, as she recognises that some people count:

a studious woman as ridiculous as an effeminate man, and learned books as unfit for her apartment, as paint, washes, and patches for his. In fine, the men will not allow it to be our sphere; so consequently we can never be supposed to move in it gracefully; but like the toad in the fable, that affected to sell itself as big as the ox, and so burst in the enterprise. But let the world confine, or enlarge learning as they please, I care not; I do not regret the time I bestowed in its company (1713:53).

Barker/Galesia has made it clear that she has a stake in the literary sphere that she will not relinquish.

Galesia's career as a writer is developed in another novel *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies or Love and Virtue* (1723). In this book, both Barker/Galesia is much more confident about women writing and the patchwork screen is used as a metaphor for writing.<sup>12</sup> Galesia is involved in an accident when the coach she is travelling in overturns, and she is befriended by a local woman who hopes, once her trunks arrive, there will be bits for sewing into her patchwork screen: "But when the trunks and boxes came and were opened, alas! They found nothing but pieces of Romance, poems, love-letters and the like. At which the good lady smiled saying: she would not have her fancy backed and therefore resolved to have these ranged and mixed in due order, and therefore compose a screen" (1723:4). Galesia's pieces of writing will go into the screen along with the other women's pieces of sewing. Thus, it seems as if Galesia is determined to make writing her sphere, whatever the rest of society and in particular the men may say. Galesia finds herself reading Katherine Phillips again: "I began to emulate her wit and aspired to imitate her writings; in doing which I think I deserved Arachne's fate, or at least to be transformed into one of Mack Fleckno's followers, her noble genius being inimitable" (1723:3). In spite of her self doubts, Galesia then offers the reader a verse landscape called *The Grove*, which is so successful that the lady says it will do very well "since a landscape in a screen is very agreeable" (1723: 5). She also offers her hostess a pindaric poem on the rivulet with the excuse that her "fingers ought to have been employed rather at the needle and the distaff, than to the pen and Standish, and leave these enterprises to the learned" (1723:7-8), presumably implying, to men.

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10 A modern equivalent might be Seamus Heaney using the metaphor of digging for writing (1969:13).

However, Galesia continues to struggle with the idea of herself as a writer, comparing what she does with a group of young Cambridge students who come to her house. She tells them that the Tree of Knowledge will not grow “in our (ie female) cold clime” while “God and Nature for you (ie men) constitute luxurious banquets of this dainty fruit” (1723:25). Later, Galesia goes to London with her mother where she is desperate to find a room of her own. This materialises as:

a closet in my landlady’s back garret which I crept into as if it had been a cave on the Top of Parnassus; the habitation of some unfortunate muse that had inspired Cowley, Butler, Otway or Orinda with notions different from the rest of mankind, and for that fault were there made prisoners.....this hole was to me a kind of paradise where I thought I met with my old acquaintance.....my impertinent muse here found me(1723:65).

On one occasion, when she is in her closet there is a terrible knocking on the door to the leads and a gentlewoman on the run rushes in. This makes Galesia doubt once more the efficacy of writing for a woman, especially when her mother tells her she should not pass her “time in idle dreams on Parnassus and foolish romantic flights with Icarus” (1723:80). She would do better, her mother says, to marry and have a family and look after her children, servants and neighbours because that is after all what she was born for. However, as Galesia’s story unfolds, she finds increasing affinity with the idea of staying single and writes a poem *To A Virgin Life* and another poem *On Chastity*. In her sequel, *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen* (1726), Barker continues the story of Galesia who offers more pieces of writing, which are so big now she coins a new word for them: panework. Galesia defends her own position as writer by recounting a dream in which she is led up Parnassus to see a ceremony crowning Orinda (Katherine Phillips). She describes Orinda seated on her throne as Queen of Female Writers, with a golden pen in her hand as a sceptre. The ceremony includes a male bard being less than generous in his praise of Orinda and he is unceremoniously mocked, first by a chorus of grasshoppers and then a chorus of nightingales. Galesia’s story ends with her receiving a cargo of female virtues, which she proceeds to distribute to the court, the theatres, and the city (1723:172-8). Barker might have wanted to include some virtues for her fellow novelists like Eliza Heywood who, in Barker’s view, was decidedly short on female virtue. Reading Heywood’s work, Barker would indeed consider herself smutted and defiled. This became the recurring problem for Barker’s successors. Galesia kept herself pure by refusing marriage and staying a virgin. Later novelists would find it more difficult to allow their heroines to follow this path. It would be interesting to speculate on The Trifler’s attitude to Galesia/Barker: he would deem

marriage as the purpose of woman's existence, and therefore could no more esteem her as a writing virgin than as a writing wife.<sup>13</sup>

Barker's influence can be seen on later writers like Charlotte Lennox, since her heroines often tell their own story in the first person. Charlotte Lennox's first novel, *The Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by Herself* (1750:1996), adopts a similar technique. It opens: "You ask me, dear Amanda, to give you a relation of my life" (1750:1996:Vol.1:2). The novel, therefore, becomes one long letter to Amanda without any replies. As in the first volume of *Pamela* (1740), this allows the heroine to tell her own story and in doing so to create her own picture of herself. The reader has only the heroine's word for what happens and the heroine's interpretation of events and of her own motives. Michael Owens (1996:1-2) suggests that Lennox gave implicit consent to the idea that Harriot Stuart's fictional autobiography was the author's own. This helps to make Harriot into a professional writer as a reflection of Lennox herself.<sup>14</sup> Apart from telling her own story, Harriot also writes poems which become part of the story and are given in the text. Harriot explains how her writing developed:

I had as yet employed my pen in no other way than by writing to a young lady, for whom I had contracted an extravagant friendship. As my notions of this passion were mightily refined and delicate, my letters were filled with an enthusiastic tenderness, which gave birth to the most lively flights of imagination. I wrote in a kind of poetic prose (750: 1996:Vol.1:2).

Harriot is only eleven years old when she falls in love and this propels her into the next stage in her writing:

I wrote to my female friend, whom I called Sylvia; and in a truly romantic style, related the whole adventure. But, when I came to describe the person of my lover, an involuntary impulse made me throw my thoughts into verse; and this first attempt in poetry was thought so tender and passionate, that it procured me the name of Sappho.....From this moment I took so much delight in writing, that my mother was extremely offended at it (750:1996:Vol.1:3)

When she is parted from her lover she uses her pen to bewail his absence. She continues to write poetry for her next lover, Dumont, a young man whom she meets on board ship to America. Her mother becomes even more offended when she refuses a lover chosen by her parents and blames Harriot's reading of romances as much as her writing of poetry. Harriot continues to write: "My little poetical productions gained me

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<sup>13</sup> Barker also makes use of the dedication and preface to her books to put forward her views on writing.

<sup>14</sup> This could be another example of autonarration, a concept offered by Tilottama Rajan, discussed in chapter 3.

an applause I was far from thinking I deserved; but my youth and sex stamped a kind of unquestionable merit on my writings, and procured me the addresses of all the wits” (1750:1996: Vol.1:41). Harriot is aware of the danger of this and writes some satirical pieces to counter the effect. However, she is ready to take part in a poetic composition along with her lover, Dumont, inspired by the beauty of the local countryside when they are out on an excursion. She seems to swing in and out of being the coquette, perhaps a bit like Pamela. Indeed, she admits that her poetry did lead her into trouble when she was on board ship returning to England. She had written a poem, *A Hymn to Venus*, which falls into the hands of the Captain, who then uses it to persuade himself that there would be nothing wrong in trying to seduce her. She only escapes by stabbing him. The male viewpoint is that a woman who writes has only herself to blame if men see her as sexually available. Stabbing is an extreme response, but presumably Lennox is implying that women have no alternative if they wish to protect their virtue and their right to write.

After many vicissitudes in London, Harriot is abducted by the uncle of her lover’s previous love and imprisoned in a convent in France. She is led to believe that Dumont has been unfaithful. In the convent she is befriended by a young woman, Miss Belville. Harriot continues to write but again her poem, *On Reading Hutchinson on the Passions* (1750:1969:Vol II:41), leads her into trouble because Miss Belville shows it to a powerful acquaintance, a marchioness who lives outside the convent. It is through this woman that it falls into the hands of the Count de R, who uses it as a pretext for an attempted seduction of Harriot. This is the second time that Harriot is at risk from a man who thinks that the fact that she is a writer is an excuse to treat her as sexually available and unworthy of esteem.

When Harriot escapes this threat and eventually arrives back in England, she is united with her sister and mother and spends her time reading and writing. Another poem, *To Delia, Inviting her to a retreat in the country* (1750:1996:Vol II:55), written as an invitation to Miss Belville, has the effect of bringing her in touch with another of her lovers, a Mr Campbel, who had helped her on board ship and in London. Harriot has preserved her honour and kept her heart true to the man she really loves. It is arguable that her writing sustains her in her troubles, even if, on occasions, the writing causes some of the difficult situations she finds herself in. Lennox seems to be saying that a young woman has a right to be a writer without unscrupulous libertines taking

advantage. In *To Delia*, Harriot and/or Lennox makes plain how the two women will spend their time. Delia is asked to show “thy melting eloquence/Thy sprightly wit, thy manly sense” and together “Our thoughts to heav’nly numbers raise,/Repeating Pope’s harmonious lays:/Now Homer’s awful leaves turn o’er,/Or graver history explore;/Or study Plato’s sacred page,/ Uncommon to our sex and age” (1750:1996: Vol.II.55). They will confirm their friendship and “recount the arts of faithless man”. In fact, Miss Belville marries her lover, and Harriot, learning that the story of Dumont’s unfaithfulness has been invented by the uncle, agrees to give her hand to Dumont. The reader is not told whether Harriot continues to write after her marriage. Lennox makes a statement about the power of a woman writing before marriage, but does not apparently have the courage or belief to say anything about the married woman writer.

Barker and Lennox strive to depict their heroines as having stories to tell. Barker, in particular, defends both her own and her heroine’s right to be an author. Both are prepared to remain single in order to write. If there are critics who think, like the contributor to the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, referred to in section 2, that writing women will not have time for their domestic duties as wives and mothers, then Barker’s solution is not to marry. However, that is not the solution chosen by most women novelists for their writing heroines.

#### 4. The Writing Heroine after 1790

In some cases, in real life and in novels, women only take up writing because their marriage has failed and they are in financial difficulties. This was true of Charlotte Smith and she illustrates her own problems in the character of Mrs Denzil in *The Banished Man* (1794).<sup>15</sup> This point about the financial need which leads some women into writing, is made even more strongly in Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* (1799), and in both this novel and the earlier *Walsingham* (1797), she creates important women characters who are writers, and in each case, a woman who needs not only to earn her living as a writer but who at the same time shows her genius too. Robinson wants to defend women writers who are attacked by critics and others and she interrupts her narrative about Walsingham, the young man who takes lodgings with a woman writer, to defend the writer: “Let it be remembered, that a true genius is, of all things in nature, the most irritably alive to every attack which menaces a diminution of that fame,

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<sup>15</sup> In *Ethelinde* (1789) she depicts another side of the woman writer – a young woman, Clarinthia Ludford, who simply indulges in novel-writing as a frivolous pursuit.

which is the pride of its existence” (1797:Vol.2:198-9). She claims that the writer “would live in the annals of their country when their calumniator’s name was no longer remembered.” Equally, Robinson is keen to defend her woman writer from attacks for political reasons or from being no better than “the stale Salmagundi of circulating libraries” (1797:Vol.2:198-9).<sup>16</sup> Mrs Woodford’s first work, as reported by Walsingham, was a novel “with virtuous precepts, so embellished with liberal sentiments, so correct in its moral tendency, and so severe upon the profligacy of the rising generation, that few people would notice it; while the circulating libraries condemned it as dull and unprofitable stuff” (1797:Vol.2:198-9). When she turns her hand to a Gothic romance, her “book of terrors” was “condemned, executed, cut up, hashed, frittered, minced,” by its critics. Robinson shows here the dilemma of the novelist in trying to please her readers. Mrs Woodford’s satirical poem and comedy achieve no success either. Robinson satirises the critics in the character of a Mr Gnat who despises most writers, but she creates a more welcoming critic in her Mr Optic. Mr Gnat admits that he and his fellow critics often condemn works without having read them, and Charlotte Smith’s *Sonnets* fall into this category; while Mr Optic claims “there certainly are women, whose books present types of good sense, and whose title to applause will flourish amidst the leaves of Parnassus” (1797: Vol.2:256). Mr Optic, as his name suggests, has the insight to be able to recognise that women are capable of good writing.

In *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Robinson creates a heroine, Martha, who needs to write because she is ejected from her house by her husband for suspected infidelity. Martha Morley has had a boarding school education, but one that has allowed her to become a well read woman, and not a simpering young lady only interested in fashion. That role is reserved for her sister who has been taught by a governess at home. Because the parents are themselves uneducated middleclass citizens who have made their money in business, Martha rejects her father’s way of life and agrees to marry Mr Morley since he appears hard-working and sober. It is revealed that he has married her, not because of her education and intellect, but because he thinks she will do what he tells her to. After various escapades and without any source of income, “she determined on making the modern experiment, both for the attainment of fame and profit, by writing a Novel” (1799:Vol.2:34). Robinson recounts the different kinds of novel her

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<sup>16</sup> I comment in more detail on circulating libraries in chapter 5 and refer to Walsingham’s visit to a circulating library in Bristol.



heroine might write, from the Gothic to the sentimental, although she rejects most of them as out of fashion.

Like Mrs Woodford in Robinson's earlier novel, Martha is not left with much choice but she produces two volumes in six weeks hard work: "The story was melancholy, the portraits drawn from living characters, and the title both interesting and attractive." However, Martha has not done her research. She takes her novel to Paternoster Row and is told that the market is overstocked and that "the species of composition in which she had indulged her fancy was become a very drug, only palatable to splenetic valetudinarians and boarding-school misses" (1799:Vol.2:35). The suggestion here seems to be that the sentimental novel, telling the story of characters drawn from life is no longer fashionable. However, what Robinson wishes to point out in describing Martha's efforts, is that whatever she does, her book will not be accepted.

She then tries the more fashionable booksellers in Pall-Mall and Bond Street but fares no better. Mr Index, as Robinson has cleverly chosen to call the bookseller, tells her he has warehouses full of unsold sentimental novels and warns her of the danger of prosecutions if authors draw their character from real life. He sees little prospect of success for her if she continues to write "with a mere pen". " 'What else should I write with?' said Mrs Morley. 'A lancet, to be sure. You should cut your subject keenly; make your operations salutary; teach your patients to tremble, while you cure them of their most obstinate and contagious follies. A pen! Ridiculous!'" (1799:Vol.2:35). Robinson's next attack, through the voice of Mr Index, is on those writers who toady to their patrons in their dedications. Mr Index advises Martha to write a dedication "full of fine words and laboured panegyric.....A feather of the finest dimensions, dipped in honey, will compose an excellent introductory passport." Having praised the good qualities of the patron, the author must then "not forget to declare that you abhor flattery, and that your mind is as independent as your writings" (1799:Vol.2: 40). Here Robinson is satirising the novelists who dedicate their novels to important people in the hope that that will achieve publication and large sales.<sup>17</sup> Mr Index gives Martha £10 for her novel but Robinson does not tell the reader at this point in the story whether it is published or not.

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<sup>17</sup> Dedications were indeed seen by many women novelists as a way of claiming respectability. Fanny Burney dedicated her first novel to her father; other novelists dedicated novels to royalty or certainly members of the aristocracy. I examine some of these in chapter 4.

Martha tries poetry next and sends some of her work to magazines and newspapers but finds that “her thoughts were too refined, her subjects too delicate for the vitiated taste of the present day” (1799:Vol.2:51). There is an irony here because at the very time that Robinson was writing about the difficulties of her heroine Martha, she herself was being successful, both in having her poems printed in *The Lady’s Magazine* and having several of her novels published. In fact, the end papers of the 1799 edition of *The Natural Daughter* contain advertisements for several more of Robinson’s books. But Robinson knew that that sort of success was not available to every aspiring woman writer.

Martha’s next venture into the publishing world is her attempt to obtain sponsorship for her Odes. Robinson is ready to use her own satirical “lancet” in describing Martha’s approach to the Marquis of Downlands: “She wrote to this patron of the Muses, this guardian of unfriended genius, this modern Maecenas, the Atlas of British Literature” (1799:Vol.2: 86). Martha, of course, receives no reply. Her subsequent attempts to elicit support from Lady Eldercourt afford Robinson further satirical opportunities for attacking the system of patronage, when Martha finds that Lady Eldercourt’s femme de chambre has read more widely than her mistress, and is in charge of all the applications from aspiring writers. Lady Eldercourt’s fashionable friends mock Martha: “ ‘I suppose she is one of the Julias or Sapphos of the present day. I never read their productions without being amused beyond measure – poor things’ ” (1799: Vol.2: 108). Another woman asks Martha directly: “ ‘Pray ma’am, do you write in the newspapers?....Are you Anna Matilda, or Della Crusca, or Laura Maria. Comical creatures. They have made me shed many a tear, though I never more than half understood them’ ” (1799:Vol.2:108).<sup>18</sup>

Martha is then allowed to read one of her odes: *Ode to the Bluebell* which Robinson includes in the text. It is a thinly veiled attack on the aristocracy of wealth represented by the bluebell, and a defence of the aristocracy of genius represented by the nettle and the hemlock. Lady Eldercourt understands the allegory only too well and offers Martha £5. Martha faints and is taken home by a sympathetic nobleman, presumably a man of wealth able to recognise genius. Robinson then interrupts her story with an appeal to the reader to sympathise with the “children of Genius” who have to encounter so many trials:

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<sup>18</sup> These are the names adopted by poets of the Della Cruscan movement.

you will perceive, that of all the occupations which industry can pursue, those of literary toil are the most fatiguing. That which seems to the vacant eye a mere playful amusement, is in reality an Herculaean labour; and to compose a tolerable work is so difficult a task, that the fastidiously severe should make the trial before they presume to condemn even the humblest effort of imagination (1799:Vol. 2:121).<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that Robinson sees women writers as part of a public literary sphere where they deserve both admiration and esteem. But Martha's literary tribulations are not yet over. Constrained in a madhouse when she admits to being a young woman who is threatened with kidnap by her step-mother's family, Martha asks for a novel and is given her own novel for which she was previously paid £10. When she exclaims that she is the author, the nurse comments: "she thinks that she can make books. She is not the only crazy woman who fancies herself an authoress" (1799:Vol.2:134). The novel ends with Mr Morley, having proved himself a villain in more ways than one, falling over a precipice in Switzerland, which allows Martha to marry her admirer, Lord Francis Sherville. Robinson does not choose to tell Martha's story after her marriage. The implication is that Martha will not continue writing because she has no need for the income. Of course, Robinson will go on writing, although she does not spell that out at the end of the novel as for instance Amelia Beauclerc does at the end of *Husband Hunters!* (1804). Both Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson are determined defenders of women writers. They understand how women might need to write to make a living but they also see that the novel gives women an opportunity to make their voices heard. Their characters, Mrs Denzil and Martha Morley, are far more determined than, for example, Maria in Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* (1777). In particular, Robinson's plea for the aristocracy of genius which may well contain both men and women writers, is as strong as the plea for a rational education for women made by Mary Wollstonecraft in both her novels and in her political tract.<sup>20</sup> However, there are novelists like Amelia Opie who choose to have a heroine who writes, but whose criticism of their own heroines at the same time, could be regarded as part of a backlash against the forthright views of writers like Robinson and Wollstonecraft.

Amelia Opie faces the issue of the woman writer in her novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805). She is concerned to show the dangers that might befall the woman who writes and

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<sup>19</sup> Further examples of women authors interrupting the narrative to defend novel writing are discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft refers to her heroine as a "thinking" woman in her novel, *Mary* (1788), and extends the idea of a thinking heroine in her novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), as well as in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). I examine her advertisement to *Mary* in chapter 4.

particularly the woman who writes on public issues. The irony, of course, is that Opie is doing exactly what her novel purports to be warning women to be ware of. Her main target, by implication, is Mary Wollstonecraft for writing polemical tracts rather than novels, but *Adeline Mowbray* is itself a polemical novel. Adeline's mother brings her daughter up on:

nothing but political tracts, systems of philosophy and Scuderi's and other romances.....Adeline had therefore read Rousseau's Contrat Social, but not his Julie; Montesquieu's Esprit des Loix, but not his Lettres Persannes; and had glowed with republican ardour over the scenes of Voltaire's Brutus, but had never had her pure mind polluted by the pages of his Candide (1805: Vol. 1:154).

The result is that Adeline imbibes a great many Wollstonecraftian ideas about women's rights and the belief that a marriage ceremony is unnecessary. She herself does not write in this tradition but on the contrary, her redemption in Opie's eyes comes through learning to read sentimental novels instead of political tracts, and in writing stories for children. When they are accepted for publication it "imparted a balsam to the wounded mind of Adeline: it seemed to open to her the path of independence; and to give her in spite of her past errors, the means of serving her fellow-creatures" (1805: Vol. 3:28).

At the end of the novel when Adeline is dying, her mother, who has written a Wollstonecraftian book on education, tries to excuse herself to the Quaker woman, Mrs Pemberton: "I am sure that I paid the greatest attention to my daughter's education. If you were but to see the voluminous manuscript on the subject which I wrote for her improvement" – to which Mrs Pemberton replies: "But where was thy daughter and how was she employed during the time that thou wert writing a book by which to educate her?.....thou didst not as parents should do, inquire into the impressions made on thy daughter's mind by the books which she perused" (1805: Vol. 3:245-8). Adeline repents for the kind of immoral life she has led, but Opie emphasises the point by having Adeline die like Wollstonecraft, whose death in childbirth was seen by many as a punishment for her unfeminine behaviour. It could be argued that Adeline's death resembles that of Rousseau's Julie: the implication at the beginning of the novel has been that Adeline might have behaved better if only she had read *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) instead of *Du Contrat Social* (1762). What is quite clear, however, is that women have no business with political writings: they should confine themselves to

writing for children.<sup>21</sup> It seems as if Opie is writing a novel about a would-be woman writer for women readers, in order to defend the novel as a site for women writers and readers. However, the fact that Adeline has to die in the process of her author's defence, seems to imply that Opie has lost as much as she has gained in staking a claim for women in the literary field.

Amelia Beauclerc's novel *Husband Hunters!* (1816) is even more equivocal about the woman writer. The novel deals with the lives of three sisters, one of whom is a writer. It is clear almost from the start that Beauclerc does not really approve of Louisa, the writer:

Louisa had, on what she called giving up the world, indulged a turn for literature, which more and more took possession of her, so as to render common society unpleasant. She had talents, but she overrated them. She was unpleasant amongst ordinary acquaintance, silent, and absent. And her gravity created an idea that she was proud and ill-natured (1816: Vol.1:30).

On the other hand she does share her writing with her younger sister Emily. She is less keen to come to her older sister, Dorothy's gatherings unless she can see a way of using the people she meets as characters in her writing and is roundly put in her place by Dorothy: " 'I can tell you one thing, Miss,' cried Dorothy, 'you will never get married if such are your plans. Who do you think would be acquainted with a petticoat author?'" (1816:Vol.1:36). Louisa's answer to this is to say that she is not a known author, although she is quick enough to run up to her room to make notes on what has just passed between her sister and herself. Louisa, moreover, has a room to run to and write in.

Later in the novel, Dorothy is revealed as an unpleasant person whose views the reader would not be likely to respect. However, Louisa falls in love with a man who appears kind in most ways except that he is indeed afraid of women authors. In the meantime, the two sisters have a great many arguments about what should go into a novel. On one occasion, Dorothy offers a story she has been told by a new male acquaintance about how he found a manuscript in a cave. Louisa is not impressed:

'Say no more, Dorothea, I beseech you,' cried Louisa; 'were I reduced to such materials to fill my pages, I should consider myself as one that had the nightmare and was wearying the world by repeating my bad dreams. Where is the moral of such stuff? Can it improve the mind? No; it debilitates the

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<sup>21</sup> The implication here is that novels and writing for children are acceptable for women.

understanding, gives it a taste for cruelty and horrors, and renders sense and sentiment a dull flat waste that few like to go over' (1816: Vol. 1:82).

It seems here that Beauclerc is using Louisa as her mouthpiece for explaining what she sees as unsuitable material for a novel. She is not prepared to recommend anything too far away from real life. On the other hand, when Louisa suspects that the foundling, Ella, whom her sister Emily is befriending, is probably Emily's daughter, she "felt conscious of her own ingenuity in contriving perplexities for a novel; but that real life should afford a mystery, not easily developed in so long a period, excited her wonder more, and filled her with surprise" (1816:Vol.1:161).

Meanwhile to avoid Dorothy and the unwelcome man she has married, Louisa and Emily go to the Isle of Wight where gradually Emily's past history is revealed. Louisa finds that, in protecting her sister, she has not had time for writing, but nevertheless, her writing has led her to reject the idea of marriage: she "had formed an ideal being, in the spirit of the heroes of her books, which wealth, plain sense, and common man, could not come up to; she therefore had consigned herself willingly to a single state" (1816:Vol.2:17). She is aware that Emily's protector, Sir Lucius Fitzgerald, has fallen in love with her (Louisa), but for the moment she is more intent on finishing her novel. "She was content with the efforts of the week: her love-scenes, in particular, were wrought up to the most refined perfection; she wrote what she felt, and felt what she wrote" (1816:Vol.2:17). Again it seems as if Beauclerc is asking the reader to take Louisa's writing seriously. She is able at this point to be a loving sister, to meet friends and to be a writer with a room of her own. But just as the reader is hoping Louisa might be able to accept Sir Lucius as a lover, Beauclerc twists events so that Dorothy's predictions, about men not liking women writers, seems to come true. Louisa leaves the door of her room open when she goes out unexpectedly, and when Sir Lucius enters, he is taken aback at seeing her manuscript on the table. " 'Is she then an author?' exclaimed he; 'confusion!'" (1816:Vol.2:92). Here is the irony of the woman author allowing one of her main male heroes to denigrate women authors. In horror, Sir Lucius goes to the woods to bemoan his fate of falling in love with a woman who writes:

'Who would marry an author? To live in eternal contest for pre-eminence; to have sound common sense despised, for the froth of whipt syllabub – systematic nonsense! To be documented for having my own opinion by a mockery of pedantry; and, worse than all, to have my domestic arrangements neglected, while my author wife is in her study, planning things that nobody

but herself ever thought of, by way of publishing her folly in something new and uncommon ...What would the world have said had Sir Lucius Fitzgerald married an author?" (1816:Vol.2:92).

He decides to relinquish Louisa, and is finally convinced by overhearing the comments of a fellow passenger on the ferry who is reading a book: "“Stuff and nonsense! I can’t read it; half these novels are written by milliners and ladies’ maids; every girl in these days sets up for an author!”" (1815:Vol.2: 95). The class prejudices of Beauclerc’s male characters are revealed here equally with their gender prejudices.

The modern reader is tempted to think Louisa’s decision to stay single is the right one, but contemporary readers would have known only too well that novels are about getting married, not about staying single in order to write. Beauclerc’s world is different from Jane Barker’s, and somehow the reader knows that the solution is unlikely to be one where an upper-class husband accepts a wife who writes; there are too many class and gender issues at stake. Beauclerc, however, is not prepared to allow Sir Lucius to triumph too easily, because on his travels aboard ship, he meets another woman author. This time it does not seem quite so bad to him because she is French but it is upsetting enough. “He thought himself particularly unfortunate, that the woman he really loved, and the woman who absolutely commanded his esteem and friendship, should both be affected with a mania of which he had an extreme horror” (1816:Vol.2:225). Sir Lucius tries to rationalise the situation to himself: of the countess he says: “she had been an excellent wife, had always acted with fortitude and energy, and that very energy had put her on the means, by turning author, to gain a living, when otherwise she would have starved from necessity.” Of Louisa he persuades himself: “Was not she the guardian angel of her sister? Did she not manage all the domestic concerns, and was not everything arranged with a niceness peculiar to herself.” Then he goes in to the issue of nationality and it is not entirely clear how far these thoughts belong to Sir Lucius or to Beauclerc. “But the countess was in part Frenchwoman. The French encourage female authors; but in England, so humiliating was that profession, that the men shrunk from them, and the cypress shades of celibacy usually twined over their heads” (1816:Vol.2:225). “Cypress shades” is not a phrase that encourages the reader to see celibacy as a welcome fate for the woman writer, although the reader could interpret this as Beauclerc mocking Sir Lucius. This appears even more probable when Sir Lucius raises this point with his friend Lord William.

‘This is prejudice in the extreme,’ replied Lord William, ‘I am a great novel-reader, and I assure you that great talents are required, and a thorough knowledge of the world also, to make what I call an interesting work of fancy, such as to amuse and to instruct’ (1816:Vol.2:226).

The countess performs a public reading of her novel and Sir Lucius is so impressed he asks her to lend it to him so he can finish it in bed. “ ‘You never read novels,’ said she smiling archly, ‘.....in future....throw aside prejudice, depend on your own judgment, not let the fashion of the day, on any one subject, lead you to decide unfavourably on what you are yourself ignorant of’” (1816:Vol.2: 229). The reader might be forgiven at this point for imagining that Sir Lucius will hurry back to marry Louisa, the author.

Indeed, Volume 3 opens with Sir Lucius saying to himself: “ ‘I might have been convinced as I am now, that a female author can possess sense, judgment, and domestic virtues’” (1816:Vol.3:2). However, Beauclerc has some more twists to offer the reader about Louisa, the female author. Although Emily and her newly-restored husband know why Sir Lucius ran off, they have not told Louisa and instead admit that they have encouraged her to go on writing because “ ‘those fictitious illusions her pen affords and this innocent employ we think has saved her life’” (1816:Vol.4:150). This is not a very positive support for a woman writer. Later, Emily tells Louisa and then tries to make her forgive Sir Lucius, claiming that even if novels lack common sense, in real life we should act “ ‘without condemning ourselves to perpetual regrets for an imaginary slight the unfortunate hero seems to have committed, and which he is dying to explain and do entirely away’” (1816:Vol.4:166).

Louisa finds that this has challenged not only the entire basis of her writing, but also the ideas on which she bases her personal behaviour: her very warmth and friendship towards her sister are due “ ‘singly and solely to that elevation of soul you choose to ridicule as the spirit of romance’” (1816:Vol.4:182). Emily and her husband are so determined that “ ‘an author must always end up with a marriage,’” that they kidnap Louisa and persuade her to marry Sir Lucius. Louisa accepts the situation rather cleverly, but, nevertheless, tamely, writing to them: “ ‘My work is completed, all difficulties adjusted. The parties married and happy, and the heroine about to adopt some of the whimsicalities of her husband, to qualify feelings that had nearly destroyed her’” (1816:Vol.4:192), and later in another letter she confesses “ ‘that matrimony had outrivaled the witching charms felt by an author’” (1816:Vol.4:229). Thus, it seems that Beauclerc does not have the courage to allow Louisa to go on being an author. This must have worried her because, having made practically no authorial interventions in



the body of her text, she ends the novel: “Thus, gentle reader, having made every body happy, allow me to remain with respect and consideration, indefatigably and perseveringly AN AUTHOR” (1816:Vol.4:230). In the end, Beauclerc cannot maintain an inscription of herself as author within the narrative of the text itself, as for instance, Jane Barker does, but then Barker opts for celibacy. Beauclerc’s final declaration of herself as an author is at the expense of her heroine, Louisa.

However, perseverance as a writer is to be found once more in the heroine of Sydney Owenson’s novel in the form of the national tale. Sydney Owenson’s novel, *Florence McCarthy* (1826). is particularly interesting because she is concerned not only with the position and status of the woman writer but also with a woman writer who takes on the important role of writing a national tale. Owenson had already found success with her national tale, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), where she manages to bring personal and public issues together.<sup>22</sup> The first appearance of the character who is the writer, in *Florence McCarthy*, is seen through the eyes of two of the male protagonists, the Commodore and a young man called de Vere, arriving in Dublin. De Vere is on his first visit and touring Ireland with Edmind Spenser’s description in hand. The two men see an old woman seated at a writing table in their hotel, dressed in old-fashioned clothes, and are horrified when she leaves them a note offering to travel further with them. They refuse Molly Magillicuddy’s offer, since a woman writing in a public place is obviously suspect (1826:Vol.1:73).

Later, when the two travellers arrive at the Fitzadelm house they wish to visit, they find that Mrs Magillicuddy is the housekeeper. Their response to her showing them the theatre and portraits by Peter Lely and Godfrey Kneller, and landscapes by Joseph Michael Gandy, is similar: “ ‘I hate intellect in women,’ ” de Vere says (1826:Vol.1:15). Owenson is building up a picture of male distaste for a woman who has something interesting to write and talk about. The reader does not hear much more of Mrs Magillicuddy during the next section of the novel, but learns instead about Crawley who is agent for the absent landowner, Lady Dunore; about the local hedge school and rebellion by local peasants. There is a suspicion that the Commodore may be Lord Fitzadelm, one of Lady Dunore’s sons who has returned to Ireland in disguise. There is a kind of mock trial to deal with the peasants and others who have taken part in the revolt and, during this trial, a woman prisoner is found to be Lady Clancare. She

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<sup>22</sup> I analyse this novel in chapter 4.

appears to be descended from the Irish national hero, Florence Macarthy, and Lady Dunore had met her in London. It seems she is a writer:

‘I think she was brought about for writing books.’ ‘Writing books!’ re-echoed Lord Frederick in a tone of alarm; ‘you don’t really mean that?’ ‘Not absolutely books, I believe, but tales, stories, something about Ireland, and Spain and South America....but I fancy people thought they were very amusing and odd’ (1826:Vol. 3:109).

Once more, Owenson is satirising the men’s attitudes to a woman writer. Lord Frederick, who is one of Lady Dunore’s English friends, is still not convinced.

‘I have no objection. But with respect to ladies that write books, en tout and par tout, je quitte la partie. It’s a pity too, for she’s a pretty, odd, shy, sly looking concern enough. But really Lady Dunore’s bringing a live author down upon us, à porte fermée, as we are living at present, is too bad; and the worst of all authors, a noble author’ (1826: Vol.3:110).

In Amelia Beauclerc’s *Husband Hunters!* (1816: Vol.2: 95), one of the male characters finds a lower class woman writer more distasteful, but here the aristocratic male cannot forgive a woman of his class for being a writer. Another member of the Dunore household, Judge Aubrey adds: “ ‘I did not know before that she labours under the odium of writing books, for there is certainly no personification of authorship about her – no pretension whatever’ ” (1826:Vol.3:111).

Later when Lady Clanclare is visited in the writing room of her home, Castle Macarthy, she refers to being an author:

‘with Ireland in my heart, and epitomizing something of her humour and her sufferings in my own character and story. I do trade upon the materials she furnishes me; and turning my patriotism into pounds, shillings and pence, endeavour, at the same moment to serve her and support myself. Meantime my wheel, like my brain, runs round. I spin my story and my flax together; draw out a chapter and an hank in the same moment; and frequently break off the thread of my reel and of my narration under the influence of the same association ...I do much in giving an example of constant ceaseless industry and activity to my people. When I am not writing, for I write for bread, I am planting potatoes or presiding over turfbogs’ (Vol.3: 265 and 269-70).

It seems that the more she insists on the national character of her writing and the fact that she earns money by writing, the more she upsets the upper class society around her. Lord Frederick continues to find it difficult to accept her as a writer: “ ‘It looks as if she were extracting us all for her common-place book, and will doubtless bring us out in hot-press, sans dire gar.’ ” Young Crawley says:

‘Her principles as disseminated in her National Tales as she calls them are sufficient to keep her out of good society here...I recollected having looked over those tomes of absurdity and vagueness, of daring blasphemy, of affectation, of bad taste, bombast and nonsense, blunders, ignorance, Jacobinism and falsehood, licentiousness and impiety, which it now seems are the effusions of the pseudo Lady Clancare’ (1826:Vol.4:35).

To which Lord Frederick replies: “ ‘Say no more or you will make us in love with the author and her work together; for, really, a book that could combine all these terrific heterogeneous qualities, and yet be read, must be very odd and extraordinary, pour le moins’ ” (1826:Vol.4:36).

Lady Clancare has, in a way, been even more extraordinary, since she has been playing several roles, as Lady Clancare, Florence Macarthy and Mary Magillicuddy, partly in order to win back her former lover, Adelm, who himself has been in disguise as the Commodore and as a South American general. She tells him that she has been imposing on Lady Dunore in order to help the poor people of Ireland and how this has made real life stranger than fiction: “ ‘I have imposed on her by facts extraordinary beyond the utmost daring of fiction; as the events of real life always exceed the power of invention’ ” (1826:Vol.4:105). Several members of Lady Dunore’s household suggest she should be an actress since she would make more money and people would notice her death, which they will not, if she remains a writer. They ask her to recount her life but she refuses and uses this opportunity to point out the irritations faced by authors:

‘should my story be serious, you would yawn over it; should it be romantic you would quiz it; if philosophical, you would not understand it; if common-place, you would abuse it; if extraordinary, you would doubt it. Now it happens to be all this, and I should thus unite every species of criticism against me’ (1826:Vol.4:152).

Eventually, Lady Clancare admits to her various disguises and the Commodore/General admits to being the rightful Fitzadelm heir and the two get married. Lady Clancare announces her intentions for the future: “ ‘then seated by my Irish turf fire, with my own amusement for my object, and my husband for my critical reviewer, I shall take the liberty of putting myself in my own book, and shall record the events of this last month of my life under the title of – Florence Macarthy’ ” (1826:Vol.4:274). Thus, unlike Beauclerc’s writing heroine, she will continue to write after marriage because she wants to tell her own story, although the phrase “for my own amusement” makes the reader wonder if Owenson is reluctant to make her heroine into a writer for the public. Owenson’s book was published and widely read, but we do not know if same entry into

the literary public sphere awaited Lady Clancare's book. Owenson's satire of the male characters who attack her heroine, Florence McCarthy/Lady Clancare, make a strong plea for women writers, in keeping with Robinson's defence of her heroine, Martha Morley as a member of the aristocracy of genius.

##### **5. The Writer in the Novel: the Role of the Improvisatrice in Madame de Staël, Mrs Foster and Ann Harding**

The dilemma of women authors being unsure how to treat their writing heroine faces another writer of the period, Madame de Staël and her heroine Corinne in *Corinne ou L'Italie* (1805). Madame de Staël was a writer who spent a great deal of time in the literary public sphere if not in the directly political. As daughter and wife of politicians at the time of the French Revolution, she was inevitably caught up in political issues. Her public statements were made both in political and literary salons and through her novels. One of her most important novels, which features a woman character who in turn speaks in the public sphere, is *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1805). The heroine, Corinne, is not a writer in the traditional sense but an improvisatrice who makes up her own speeches and delivers them in public in Rome. Most of her subjects are based on Roman and Italian history but she comes to represent more than a mouthpiece for historical facts. Madame de Staël in her own life was able to inhabit the literary public sphere and to some extent the political one too, although she left France because of the way the Revolutionary leadership, the Directory and Napoleon left women out of the political and constitutional scene. She establishes Corinne as a woman who can speak in public but only in Italy. In England she is seen as no better than an actress, and de Staël portrays the English aristocracy as highly inimical to the idea of women speaking in public. Readers may wonder why de Staël allows Corinne to fall victim to that aristocracy in the person of her lover Nelvil, who deserts her for her half sister, Lucile. Corinne does not rally her forces, either physical or mental, and dies at the end of the novel. The only way in which the tradition of improvisatrice is likely to be continued is through her niece, Juliette, whom she begins to train before she dies. Perhaps de Staël sees it as more important to suggest that there is a future for the idea, rather than for the individual.

“ ‘Elle m’a promis de m’apprendre tout ce qu’elle sait. Elle dit qu’elle veut que je rassemble à Corinne,’ ” Juliette tells her father not knowing that it was Corinne she had

been to see (1805:1985:575).<sup>23</sup> Juliette's mother, Lucile, understands what Corinne is intending: "Elle savait par Juliette que la pauvre Corinne, dans son état de faiblesse et de déperissement, se donnait une peine extrême pour l'instruire et lui communiquer tous ses talents, comme un heritage qu'elle se plaisait à lui léguer de son vivant."<sup>24</sup> Juliette is afraid Corinne may be trying to separate her from Nelvil but she is reconciled to allowing Corinne to continue teaching her, because she does not want to be seen "de lui enlever des leçons qui ajoutaient à ses agréments d'une manière si remarquable" (1805:1985:575).<sup>25</sup>

There remains the problem for twenty first century readers, however, who know how the nineteenth century is going to develop, that Juliette is unlikely to be offered the chance of being an improvisatrice in England or Scotland, when she returns from Italy after Corinne's death. On the other hand, if she does, she will more than likely have to relinquish marriage like her aunt, or dedicate herself to virginity like Galesia in Jane Barker's novels nearly a century earlier. Indeed, there are several responses to Corinne, by both male and female authors in England, that exploit de Staël's dilemma. Mrs Foster, in her novel *The Corinna of England* (1809), makes it quite clear that no respectable woman could be an improvisatrice and expect to be married. One of the main characters, Miss Moreton, fancies herself as a speaker and performer, establishes a theatre in her house and fills it with bogus philosophers, writers, and Italianate furniture. As far as Mrs Foster is concerned, she is ruining her position as a marriageable woman as a result of indulging in too much sentiment, spending too much time appealing to St. Preux and Werther (1809:Vol.1:99-100). However, Mrs Foster claims that even more to blame for her unacceptable behaviour, are de Staël's heroines, Delphine and Corinne (1809:Vol. 1:174). The foil for Miss Moreton is respectable Mary Cuthbert who achieves marriage to her lover Montgomery, while Miss Moreton is killed jumping out of a Covent Garden window during a fire. Mrs Foster ends her novel with a sly apology:

We fear that we shall be accused of the murder of Miss Moreton, our redoubtable heroine; but reader! In the intricacies of her destiny, we had imposed on ourselves no easy task. It was impossible to let a lady on stilts

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<sup>23</sup> "She has promised to teach me everything she knows. She says she wants me to be like Corinne."

<sup>24</sup> "She knew through Juliette that poor Corinne, in her feeble and deteriorating state, has taken extreme pains to instruct her and communicate to her all her talents, as a legacy which it gives her pleasure to leave to her during her lifetime."

<sup>25</sup> "to be taking away from her the lessons which were making life better for her in such a remarkable way."

slide down gently – and (be merciful, O reader!) it was not murder, believe us, but accidental death (1809:Vol.3.245)

Like Amelia Beauclerc, Mrs Foster deals her female protagonist a body blow as writer; but unlike Beauclerc, she does not allow Miss Moreton to stop being an improvisatrice and marry; instead she engineers her death, an increasingly common option used by nineteenth century novelists for their fallen women characters. However, Miss Moreton is not a sexually fallen woman: she has fallen because she wishes to perform in public. For Mrs Foster the two have become equated.

This issue is raised in Anne Harding's *The Refugees* (1822). Harding devotes nearly one hundred pages to a description of the heroine, Constantia O'Brien, in Italy performing as an outstanding improvisatrice. Unlike Mrs Foster, she does not mock her heroine, so at this point in the novel, Harding must want her readers to admire a young woman who can perform so well in public and maintain her purity and respectability:

Lady Constantia O'Brien was endowed with talents of the most extraordinary kind; from her earliest years she possessed the art of extempore poetry to a wonderful extent; subjects the most trivial, or the most exalted, were equally at her command; ...to all this was added the purest taste, and chastest eye, that ever distinguished an artist..... (1822:Vol.1:123).

Her position as improvisatrice does not last long, however. Constantia meets an English nobleman, Lord de Courville who appears to be an echo of Lord Nelvil in *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1805) with views similar to Sir Lucius Fitzgerald in *Husband Hunters!* (1816). De Courville is enchanted with Constantia but decides she is “not – oh! No, not to be made a wife of! Ridiculous! -I shall enjoy her enchanting society; listen to her as to an unearthly spirit, and preserve the domestic affections of my heart entire (1822:Vol.1:135). This is another example of the male admiring the woman appearing in the public sphere, but not esteeming her for her femininity. But Constantia has an answer for him:

Why should your sex condemn in ours every aspiring thought, every noble sentiment? A love of the fine arts, or taste for classic pursuit; a poetical imagination, and an independent freedom of action. Is not a female, whose judgment is cultivated, whose mind is refined by an acquaintance with dead and living worth, and who is capable of filling an enlarged soul with delight, is not such a one as worthy of being loved, as deserving of the entire possession of an attached, affectionate heart, as the quiet, timid retired beauties of your cloudy island? (1822:Vol.1:138).

The reader might be forgiven for thinking that since Harding has allowed Constantia to argue the case for women appearing in the artistic public sphere so strongly, she must believe in it herself. However, Harding has set up an Aunt Sally which she proceeds to knock down in the second half of the novel. The reader should have been alerted to the likelihood of this, when reading Harding's quotation from Hannah More on the title page of the novel:

It is not difficult to attract respect on great occasions, when we are kept in order by knowing that the public eye is fixed upon us. It is easy to maintain a regard to our own dignity in a 'Symposia or an academical dinner': but to labour to maintain it in the recesses of domestic privacy requires more watchfulness, and is no less the duty, than it will be the habitual practice, of the consistent Christian (1822: N. pag.).

To follow the precepts of Hannah More, Constantia must return to domestic privacy. She therefore sacrifices her career as an improvisatrice, returns to Ireland,<sup>26</sup> and devotes her time to setting up poultry farms and spinning rooms for the Irish poor, while her lover continues his grand tour of Italy. When he returns, she has proved that in spite of being accustomed "to public exhibition, to popular applause, to the gaze and shouts of admiring multitudes," she is content "to form the happiness of one particular individual, to study his heart, and live for him alone, content with the admiration and esteem of a circle of friends, yet striving to shine in the domestic only" (1822: Vol.1:141). As if to emphasise the difference between British aristocratic beliefs and French democratic beliefs, Harding has St.Louis, a French revolutionary refugee, wish that he had met Constantia before de Courville had, so that "her public life should have been my pride and glory" (1822:Vol.II:160).

But St Louis not only has to give up his idea of woman in the public sphere, but loses his life as well. There are no apologies by Harding for an accidental murder. On the contrary, she introduces a Miss Elphinstone into the story as a possible friend for St Louis, only to condemn her, because two years in Paris during the Revolution "had tinctured Miss Elphinstone's almost masculine mind, with somewhat of republicanism" (1822:Vol. III:22). Harding has no doubt that even if Miss Elphinstone does not perform in public, her republican views prevent her from being esteemed as a woman: she has a masculine mind.

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<sup>26</sup> The novel is also a national tale, full of scoldings for absentee landlords, but equally for the United Irishmen and dark democratic Italians.

De Courville takes Constantia to London to introduce her to London society. Ironically, Harding writes: “With inexpressible delight Lord de Courville saw his wife the gaze of every public place; the magnet of attraction at the numerous splendid parties they were in some measure, obliged to be seen at” (1822:Vol.III:159). A married woman, therefore, may attract the gaze in public places socially, as long as she is only reflecting her virtue as a wife and mother, and not exhibiting her own talents. As her mother points out, they are going to London to prove “how superior is the Christian British wife, to the far-famed Italian enchantress” (1822:Vol.III:107)<sup>27</sup> A novel that begins with the promise of a woman making a name for herself in the literary public sphere, ends with the woman safely married in the domestic sphere, with her widest reach into the public sphere extending at best to good works in the community, and at worst, to being shown off by her husband in London society.

What most of the writers I analyse in this chapter achieve, to put it in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms (1993), is to stake a claim to the right to participate in the literary field, but then to desert it. The symbolic violence of the male world makes them withdraw. It is as if they are using the novel as they might use a bathing machine for getting out into the sea without showing too much flesh – the modest genius perhaps as described in *The Lady’s Magazine*. The novel, like the bathing machine ought to protect them from charges of immodesty: *The Lady’s Magazine* actually reports as a news item how two ladies are stranded when the horses cannot pull their bathing machine back out of the water. On this occasion, they are saved by some obliging gentlemen. But to extend the metaphor, there are too many gentleman standing by ready to condemn the women who get themselves into the deep water of novel-writing with no clothes on. The women writing these novels are not completely in charge of the politics of the novel. As Markman Ellis has pointed out, “the novel can function as an imaginary and exemplary text demonstrating a practical (though fictional) application of the social theories of the political theorists” (1996:137), but it does not always manage to do so completely: there are too many critics who show their antagonism to women writing. Sonia Hofkosh (1993:245), in her discussion of whether women could make writing a profession, refers to Hazlitt’s views on women as writers: “I have an utter aversion of Bluestockings. I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what an author means” (1821:1985:255).

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<sup>27</sup> As a footnote to the story of Corinne, see also Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Although it was written well outside the dates of novels I am analysing, Browning is at pains to prove that her heroine could be both Christian British wife and Italian enchantress, in other words esteemed as woman and admired as writer.



Hofkosh reminds readers of Thomas Matthias' description of women novelists "whining or frisking in novels, till our girls' heads turn wild with impossible adventures, and are now and then tainted with democracy" (Mathias:1798:58). Hofkosh suggests that when women sell their books, it is as if they are selling themselves, and so becoming prostitutes.<sup>28</sup> I would argue that when women invent women characters who write, they hide what they fear might be their own immodesty behind the modesty of their characters: they may be admired as authors themselves but they make sure their women characters will be esteemed as women. Nevertheless, if they are unable to make a case for their married heroines to continue writing, they can use their women characters in other ways. In the next chapter, I explore how far women novelists make use of their characters' writing in a more restricted way, but potentially more powerful way, because it is less likely to be criticised, that is, through the writing of letters.

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<sup>28</sup> It is a similar argument to that pointed out by John Brewer, referred to in chapter 1.

### Chapter 3. Authentication of Narratives through the Use of the Epistolary Form and First Person Narrators

#### 1. Introduction:

Most of the writing heroines relinquish their writing on marriage and it is their authors who continue writing, married or not. If heroines can only intermittently be permitted to write novels, they can nevertheless write letters without running the risk of stepping into an area that is beyond their limits. In this chapter, I explore how far the use of structure rather than the use of a character allows women authors a means of claiming a role in the literary public sphere or field. Letters and memoirs, as ways of structuring the novel, allow women authors to put forward a great many ideas that they might be worried about publicising in the voice of a third person narrator.<sup>1</sup> In section 2 of this chapter, I examine the technique of epistolary novels: these are sites where, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology explored in chapter 1 (1993), women novelists are able to stake out their claims to cultural fields and expand their own cultural capital. In section 3, I explore the French novelist Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Peruvienne* (1747). This novel gives a voice to an outsider who is able to critique the society of the author with an impunity that the author herself would have found embarrassing to write in her own voice. I refer to Graffigny, although she is writing in the first half of the eighteenth century, because of the particular nature of the Peruvian heroine's method of writing, using knotted threads, which emphasises, in an apparently illiterate society, the imperative for writing among women. In section 4, I analyse Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1793) where the epistolary form allows her a multiplicity of voices, male and female, across a range of political and social viewpoints. Then in section 5, I explore a novel by Sophia Lee, *The Life of a Lover* (1804), written in the 1790s, although not published till later. Lee's writing is less overtly political than Smith's, but she uses letters to deal with the difficulties faced by her heroine, Cecilia Rivers. In section 6, I extend my analysis of epistolary novels and memoirs by using Tilottama Rajan's term, autonarration, which she applies to Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) (Rajan:1993). I use this term to analyse Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch's *Truth and Fiction* (1801), in order to

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to this in chapter 1, and in chapter 2, I analyse how writers like Jane Barker and Charlotte Lennox capitalise on this format in novels written in the first part of the eighteenth century. I also analyse, in chapter 2, how magazines became places to which women could write letters and thus establish themselves as writing subjects.

highlight Gooch's use of her own experience in the creation of fiction. Section 7 of this chapter examines the use of letters in non-epistolary novels, where the letters nevertheless allow the author to express viewpoints, which might not otherwise be available in the structure of the narrative. These letters are often part of the plot of those novels where the heroine has been imprisoned, so the letters become the only way in which she can communicate with other people. These novels include Alethea Lewis' *Disobedience* (1797) and *The Microcosm* (1801); and Sarah Wilkinson's *The Mysterious Child* (1808).

## 2. The Epistolary Genre as Empowerment for Author and Heroine

The way in which the letter form allows authors to publicise different viewpoints which they might otherwise find difficult to make public has been explained by Mary Jacobus. She argues that: "Letters are the conduit by which a free-floating, freely circulating subjectivity, secreted in the bosom of the conjugal family, enters the public sphere and shapes the terms of rational Enlightenment discourse" (2001:276). Nicola Watson coined the phrase "Julie among the Jacobins" to explain how writers use the sentimental letter-writing structure of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) to subvert Rousseau's message of the domestic woman, and show that their "Julies" could take part in that Enlightenment discourse referred to by Jacobus (Watson:1994). According to Watson, this strategy was not always successful for the woman letter-writer, and Watson uses the plot of Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795) to show how, in the end, the letters of Sibilla fail to save her from the machinations of the "dark plottings" of the father figure. That is why, Watson argues, women novelists eventually give up the letter form and move to the first person narrative which may contain letters, as for example Mary Hays does, in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). The letter form, according to Julia Wright (1998), does nothing for any of the characters in *Secresy*, whether male or female. They all, she claims, "acknowledge the self-deformation that is necessary to fit into a particular cultural niche constituted in the public domain, whether a medieval castle, the epistolary genre, or a narrative persona" (1998:159). As she claims, all the characters are shocked by being in a novel which does not reflect their interest. This seems very much like an example of the issues I raise in chapter 1, where I make use of Bourdieu's idea of the field for the area where writers might stake their claims to a

part in the public sphere. Here it seems, Wright is arguing that the characters are equally struggling, which again reflects the positions of the women characters who themselves are novel-writers, which I examine in chapter 2. Indeed, Wright quotes Bourdieu to support her argument:

The sense of one's place, as the sense of what one can or cannot allow oneself, implies a tacit acceptance of one's position, a sense of limits (that's not meant for us) or – what amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and maintained, respected, and expected of others (Bourdieu:1993:231).

Here I am concerned with the writer's and character's sense of place in the epistolary form.<sup>2</sup> I argue in section 3 of this chapter that some novelists are able to use the epistolary form, as Graffigny and Hamilton do, to break through those limits. Charlotte Smith in *Desmond* (1793), as I maintain in section 4 of this chapter, manages to allow Geraldine's letters together with Desmond's, to overcome the "dark plottings" of her husband, Verney. As Watson argues, Smith does this partly by using the character of Josephine as the fallen woman to be a foil to Geraldine: "In its explicit yoking of the power of the sentimental letter and the enthusiasms of revolutionary politics, *Desmond* records perhaps the last moment at which that authentication seemed possible" (1998:159). I would argue that Mary Hays, in her two novels *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), and Mary Wollstonecraft, in her novel *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), continue that authentication through the use of memoirs. Nevertheless, the very fact that all three of these novels end with a heroine who feels defeated in her attempts to break through the limits referred to above, indicates that even letter and memoir, while allowing the author to argue her case, fail the heroine. Other less well-known writers, who continue the letter and memoir format as a way of authenticating the public/domestic interface, are Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch in her novel *Truth and Fiction* (1801) and Helena Wells in *The Stepmother* (1799).

If women authors have any doubts about where their place ought to be and what their limits are, they can always have the implied excuse that, as authors, they are not really responsible for what is in the letters written by their characters. Many authors, both male and female, go so far as to claim that the letters which constitute the text of their

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<sup>2</sup> I examine the sense of place represented by the house in chapter 5

novel have, in fact, been found by them and they are no more than editors, as Daniel Defoe does in *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Samuel Richardson in *Pamela* (1740). In making this claim, they are simply following the historical trend in the development of the epistolary novel: the early epistolary collections/novels are barely more than found letters, the writers of the letters scarcely fictionalised. Peter Conroy writing of the French tradition says:

To the extent that fictitious novels followed the same conventions and satisfied the same expectations as did real letters, they qualified as authentic and enjoyed the same 'real' status as the true letters they resembled both in format and content (1981:413).

I would argue that this similarity between real and fictitious letters enables the authors to establish the views of their letter-writers as 'real', and thus give these letters more influence over the minds of the readers.

The reader, following a dialogue between two characters in a novel, has little or no sense of spying, overhearing or intercepting, although Michel de Certeau has called all reading "poaching" (1995:150-163). Readers, he argues, are "travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (1995:150). I would argue that the same readers, reading a letter in a novel, become even more like poachers. Readers of letters become acutely aware that there has been an interception or a purloining that has enabled them to read the letters. It is this that gives the epistolary novel its power: the letter-writer's viewpoint achieves more status and offers a firmer sense of reality than their views explained by a third-person narrator can do; witness, according to Thomas Beebee (1999:9), the many people in Germany who having read Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), tried to find a living Charlotte. Beebee also refers to the case of the Russian novelist Nikolai Karamzin, who travelled to Switzerland with a copy of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) under his arm, to find the spot where Julie met St Preux (Beebee:1999: 98). It might be argued that this could have more to do with the importance of landscape, and there is, for example, no doubt of the tension between fiction and reality in the Wessex landscape of Thomas Hardy's non-epistolary novels. Nevertheless, in Jean Jacques Rousseau's case, it is the reality of Julie's and St. Preux's letters that makes Karamzin think of them as real people: "Oh my friends

why did Julie not exist? Why did Rousseau bid us seek no traces of her here? You portray for us such a beautiful being and then you say she does not exist” (Beebee: 1998:98). According to Beebee, in the Russian this reads more as if even the idea of Julie does not exist, and Beebee points to Rousseau’s preface where he says: “These letters are not letters at all. This novel is not a novel at all” (Rousseau: 1967:572: cited in Beebee:1998:98). Authors of epistolary novels often try to convince the reader that the letters are real and yet at the same time maintain that they as authors have invented the letters.<sup>3</sup>

This “straddling the borderline between fiction and reality,” as Beebee puts it, is how collections of letters and epistolary novels grew up side by side (1999:28). He points out how “model letters serve to delineate a fictional letter-writer, who becomes the locus of epistolary power and the unifier of its heterogeneous discourses” (1999:20). The epistolary novel offers more than a borderline for novelists to work in: Janet Altman calls it a:

vortex that absorbs writers and readers into the narrative center...where the action of the novel is authenticated by (pseudo-)eradication of spatio-temporal distance between the narrated action and writer, between the writer and addressee, and ultimately between these two and the reader of the novel (1982:202).

The reader is forced inside this “vortex”. Ruth Perry refers to the situation of duplicating “a woman’s consciousness by providing her letters, and then allowing the audience to get inside by reading those letters” (1980:131). She goes as far as suggesting that the penetration by the reader of a woman’s letters is in fact almost an act of male sexual violence. Even the female reader will experience some sense of that violation, although this may well be more as victim rather than as violator. It is these two possibilities of vortex and violence that give the epistolary novel its power. In the next section I explore the power generated on this borderline/ vortex in Françoise de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Peruvienne* (1747).

### **3. The Empowerment of Author and Heroine through the use of Letters in Françoise de Graffigny**

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<sup>3</sup> Rousseau’s disclaimer is reminiscent of a more recent writer, John Fowles, in chapter 13 of his novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1967) where he discusses the fictionality of his writing.

I have chosen to analyse Françoise de Graffigny's novel, *Lettres d'une Peruvienne* (1747:MLA:1993), although it was published in France in the first half of the eighteenth century, because she is very aware of both the limits and possibilities of letter writing, and the power letters give her as author in a society which did not ordinarily give women much power. The novel consists of letters written by a young Peruvian woman, Zilia, who is a virgin in the Temple of the Sun God and who is about to marry the Peruvian prince, Aza. Before this can happen, she is captured by Spaniards and taken on board ship to Europe. On the voyage, she is captured a second time by French privateers and brought to France where her captor, Deterville, treats her well and falls in love with her. All this is related in her letters to Aza to whom she remains faithful, although she is aware her letters may never reach him. Her early letters, before she learns to read and write French, are in fact "written" in Inca quipos or knotted threads. By using this format for her novel, Graffigny has managed to establish herself and her heroine as writers, through the two kinds of writing that the Peruvian woman undertakes; and she also has the opportunity to examine French society through the eyes of someone from a different culture.

It is only through her knotting/writing that Zilia can make sense of what is happening to her and, of course, let her lover know, so that in turn he might be able to let her know about himself: "les mêmes noeuds qui t'apprendront mon existence, en changeant de forme entre tes mains m'instruiront de ton sort" (1747:1993:21).<sup>4</sup> But even when she is not sure if Aza will ever read what she has written, the writing still serves a purpose: "ces noeuds qui frappent mes sens, semblent donner plus de réalité à mes pensées; la sorte de ressemblance que je m'imagine qu'ils ont avec les paroles, me fait une illusion qui trompe ma douleur; et je crois te parler, te dire que je t'aime" (1747:1993:36).<sup>5</sup> These feelings are parallel to those felt by Galesia in Jane Barker's novels (1713 and 1723), examined in chapter 2. Although Barker's novels are not epistolary, they are written in the first person so that Barker is able to establish an identity for Galesia in the narrating of her own story, as Graffigny does for Zilia. The Peruvian is so upset when her captors take her knots away from her, she fears they

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<sup>4</sup> "the same knots which will inform you of my existence, when they are re-knotted by your hands will teach me about your fate."

<sup>5</sup> "these knots which strike my senses, seem to give a sense of reality to my thoughts; the way in which I imagine they are like words, is an illusion which tricks my sadness; I think I'm talking to you, telling you that I love you."

may be able to control her thoughts and that she will lose touch with Aza, even though, so far, she has no evidence that he might have received any letters/knots from her.<sup>6</sup> Her identity as a writer is further underlined by the title: not *Lettres Peruviennes* which might have seemed a copy of Charles de Secondat Montesquieu's *Lettres Persannes* (1721), but *Lettres d'une Peruvienne* where the individual identity of the writer herself is foregrounded. In spite of this, she refers to her own name hardly at all after the first sentence of the first letter where she calls herself "ta Zilia". She does not sign her letters and we only hear her name once or twice again when she recounts how Deterville addresses her as "ma chère Zilia." On the other hand, Zilia addresses Aza by name several times in each letter as if naming him could somehow help to make sure the letter actually reaches him. Finally, Deterville finds Aza at the Spanish court but when he eventually comes to France, it is only to declare his infidelity to Zilia, made more likely by her earlier discovery that he has forsaken the Inca religion for Christianity. Zilia's final few letters are written to Deterville but she cannot give him more than her friendship. This ending implies that she will remain faithful to herself as writer rather than become a married woman: as she writes to Deterville: "Vous craignez en vain que la solitude n'altère ma santé. Croyez-moi, Deterville, elle ne devient jamais dangereuse que par l'oisiveté. Toujours occupée, je saurai me faire des plaisirs nouveaux de tout ce que l'habitude rend insipide (1747:1993:167).<sup>7</sup> Zilia's view of how a woman can usefully spend her time has much in common with Galesia's.

Zilia also becomes a reader. At first when she discovers what writers do in France, she cannot believe that they have to sell their books. Writing for her has a different kind of value. When Deterville presents her with a house of her own, she runs from room to room drunk with happiness.

Le seul endroit où je m'arretai fut une assez grande chambre entourée d'un grillage d'or, légèrement travaillé, qui renfermait un infinité de livres de toutes couleurs, de toutes formes, et d'une propreté admirable; j'étais dans un

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<sup>6</sup> This question of identity is emphasised by Graffigny when the Peruvian sees herself in a mirror for the first time. The mirror does the same for her physically as her writing does for her mentally: it was, she says, "si j'étais vis-à-vis de moi-même." (as if I was opposite myself.)

<sup>7</sup> "It is no good your being afraid that solitude will affect my health. Believe me, Deterville, my health will never be in danger except as a result of idleness. As long as I am busy, I shall find new pleasures in all the things that custom makes boring."



tel enchantement, que je croyais ne pouvoir les quitter sans les avoir tous lus (1747:1993:151).<sup>8</sup>

She has to be coaxed away by Deterville's sister, Celine.

However, Graffigny's novel is not only about woman as writer and reader: it is also about woman as traveller-cum-social critic. Graffigny had not been to Peru but she did her research so that she is able to let Zilia compare life in Peru and in France.

Graffigny writes a preface to the novel so that she can explain some of the bases of Inca society as well as putting some of the explanations into Zilia's letters. However, this is not a book about Peru but a book about France: Zilia's naivete about European and specifically French life allows Graffigny to make many criticisms, especially of the education and treatment of women in eighteenth century France. In this way, Graffigny is staking a claim to women's right to cultural capital, and the book itself is evidence of that claim, quite apart from its subject matter.

Zilia is horrified at the French love of luxury. Commenting on Celine's wedding she says "leur gout effrené pour le superflu a corrompu leur raison, leur coeur et leur esprit" and she despairs of their "frivoles sumptuosités" (1747:1993:120).<sup>9</sup> She comments on the paradox in their treatment of women: "Ils les respectent, mon cher Aza, et en même temps ils les méprisent avec un égal excès" (1747:1993:134).<sup>10</sup> The respect is imaginary since men are more concerned with their honour. Women do not receive enough education and what they do receive is more concerned with the way they look than with their souls. If women do wrong they are blamed, while men may be forgiven. "Il semble qu'en France les liens du mariage ne soient réciproques qu'au moment de la célébration, et que dans la suite les femmes seules y doivent être assujetties" (1747:1993:144)<sup>11</sup> – this a heartfelt complaint from Graffigny in the voice of Zilia, since Graffigny's first husband left her penniless after physically abusing her.

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<sup>8</sup> "The only place I stopped was in a fairly large room surrounded with gold lattice-work, delicately chased, behind which were books of all colours, all shapes and very well kept; I was so enchanted I thought I would never be able to leave without having read them all."

<sup>9</sup> "their unbridled desire for luxury has corrupted their reason, their hearts and their spirits" and she despairs of their "frivolous extravagances."

<sup>10</sup> "They respect them, my dear Aza, and at the same time they misjudge their motives with the same degree of excess."

<sup>11</sup> "It seems that in France, marriage vows apply to both parties only at the time of the wedding celebration, and that after that only women are required to follow the promises that have been made."

In both Graffigny's and Elizabeth Hamilton's novel, *Letters of a Hindoo Raj* (1796), which has a similar structure and purpose, the woman who writes is, and is likely to remain, unmarried: Zilia will refuse Deterville, and Hamilton's Charlotte Percy, who would like to be a writer, describes herself as a woman "who has no longer any parent to attend on: no family to manage: no fortune to bestow in deeds of charity: and who has it little in her power to be useful, even to a friend" (1796:1999:302). It is of course their writing that gives them the "power to be useful," a power that is important in both public and private life. As far as the authors are concerned, it is the use of the epistolary form that has given them the opportunity to comment on events in the public sphere, through the letters of a woman, in Graffigny's case, and a man in Hamilton's. This link between the private and public is made even more clearly in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), which I examine in the next section.

#### 4. "The Power to be Useful" in Charlotte Smith

That public/private "power to be useful," referred to by Elizabeth Hamilton's character, Charlotte Percy, is manifested in Charlotte Smith's epistolary novel *Desmond* (1792:1997). It is Smith's most overtly political novel: the political views of the author have been subsumed in the views of the letter-writers. Unlike Graffigny and Hamilton, Smith does not choose a foreign, non-European writer for most of her letters, but she does send her letter-writers to France where they can comment on affairs in France, and in England by comparison with France. Although the bulk of the letters in the first half of the novel are written by two male characters, Desmond and Bethel, with slightly differing political viewpoints which allow for argument and discussion, the second half of the novel has more letters written by the two sisters, Geraldine Verney and Fanny Waverley. These are mostly set in England and deal with domestic affairs, but in the last quarter of the novel when Geraldine goes to France, in fulfilment of her wifely and family duty, Smith nevertheless uses Geraldine to make political judgements and also to establish once again a space for the woman who writes.

One way in which Smith makes a plea for the woman writer is by having Geraldine refer to another epistolary novel *The Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph* (1761) by Frances Sheridan. Sheridan establishes Sidney's identity as a woman whose story is told

through the writing of letters: Geraldine writes to her sister Fanny as a way of explaining her predicament:

Do you recollect in the novel of Sidney Biddulph (one of the best that we have in our language) how poor Sidney is treated in her adversity by the haughty wife of her brother, Sir George? Perhaps there is a little similarity in our destinies – But I have no Faulkland!” (1792:1997:320).

Of course, in a way she has a Faulkland in the person of Desmond, but it is the writing of letters that makes them similar. Smith sees further into Sheridan’s purposes than Sheridan’s granddaughter, Alicia Lefanu, who wrote a biography of her grandmother, trying to show her as a domestic woman rather than a writer of any significance. On the other hand, Lefanu may have seen only too well and was determined to change the public perspective of her grandmother. Betty Schellenberg, in her article “Frances Sheridan reads John Home: Placing Sidney Biddulph in the Republic of Letters” (2001:561-577), argues that Lefanu has not helped Sheridan’s reputation as a writer by domesticating her. Schellenberg refers to Sheridan’s introduction to her novel where she mentions Home’s nationalistic play, *Douglas* (1756). Sidney, argues Schellenberg, is a hero in the same way as Douglas is in Home’s play. Their private virtue actually fosters the public good. *The Critical Review* of March 1761, quoted by Schellenberg, asks Sheridan to “continue to exert those talents, so honourable to herself, so useful, so entertaining to society, and particularly so beneficial to the Republic of Letters” (11 March:1761:197-8: cited in Schellenberg:2001:576). Here the reviewer in *The Critical Review* (1761) is able to applaud the way in which a woman writer can remain “honourable” and at the same time benefit the “Republic of Letters.” To refer back to my arguments in chapter 2 about the difficulties of women writers, Sheridan here is receiving both admiration and esteem, which is what Smith wants both for herself and for her heroine Geraldine.

Following her reference to Sheridan, Geraldine tells Fanny that she is short of books in her house in Meudon where she is waiting for news of her husband:

This deficiency of books has compelled me to have recourse to my pen and my pencil, to beguile those hours, when my soul, sickening at the past, and recoiling from the future, would very fain lose its own mournful images in the witchery of fiction (1792:1997:325).

Nevertheless, she admits that as a writer her own mournful images have played a positive role.<sup>12</sup>

I have found, however, a melancholy delight in describing these sufferings. I usually take my evening seat on the flight of steps I have described to you. – Sometimes, when I am in more tranquil spirits, I sketch, in my port-folio, the wild flowers and weeds that grow among the buildings where I sit (1792:1997:325-7).

She continues with a description in words of these wild flowers and follows it with an *Ode to the Poppy*. I would argue that the “Soul-soothing plant! – that can such blessings give/By thee the mourner bears to live!” can be read as a metaphor for writing itself. Although, in the preface, Smith explains the Ode was written by a friend, not by herself, the importance of its inclusion in the fiction is that it is represented as written by Geraldine (1792:1997:7).

Smith, however, has a project that extends beyond the inscription of the woman as writer. Her concern, as she writes in her preface, is with women’s interest in politics.<sup>13</sup> Since, in most epistolary novels, the author cannot speak as author in the text, the preface becomes an even more important site for setting out authorial intentions than with novels written in the third person. Smith opens her preface by wondering if she will be as successful “in letters as in narrative”. But since she is more concerned with the fact that her novel is about politics, and “women it is said have no business with politics” she quickly goes on to rebut this suggestion. “Why not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons or friends engaged!” (1792:1997:6). She places herself as a woman writer who is not neglecting her domestic duties: “I, however, may safely say that it was in the observance, not in the breach of duty, I became an Author” and that as a professional author she has learnt many things about the world she would not otherwise have known. Her purpose now is to say something in favour of France and the French Revolution in the cause of “truth, reason and humanity” (1792:1997:8).

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<sup>12</sup> As they did indeed in the life of Smith herself.

<sup>13</sup> I examine prefaces more generally in chapter 4 but it seems important here to give Smith’s gloss on what she is intending to achieve in her epistolary novel.

Smith knows from her own experience and reading that she cannot untangle the political and the personal. What has happened in her own life after a disastrous marriage which leaves her and her children penniless, is part of the political scene where women have no property rights and are educated to be, at worst, no more than the beautiful playthings of men, at best the managers of men's households and the mothers of their children. Thus, in her novel, while Geraldine Verney suffers the worst effects of this social scene in England, Desmond writes letters from France defending the changes made by the French after 1789, and attacking the defence of the Ancien Regime made by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke's book is written in the form of letters so it seems highly appropriate that Smith's answer comes in Desmond's letters to Bethel. Here is Smith, the ventriloquist in the voice of Desmond:

I own I never expected to have seen an elaborate treatise in favour of despotism written by an Englishman, who has always been called one of the most steady, as he undoubtedly is one of the most able of those who were esteemed the friends of the people (1792:1997:155).

However, Desmond then welcomes Burke's book because it will enable so many other people to write in the defence of "truth and reason." What Smith manages to achieve with the letters is have Bethel argue with Desmond but then eventually be won over, so that Desmond's viewpoint becomes more important because he has converted Bethel. Meanwhile, other characters like Desmond's uncle whose reactionary viewpoints on the so-called riots of Dissenters in Birmingham are reported by Bethel; and a member of parliament on the issue of slavery reported by Desmond, (as characters, they do not write their own letters) can be refuted through the satirical comments of the letter-writers. Desmond reports that when a member of parliament defended the slave trade by saying Negroes were no better than monkeys, he, Desmond, replied: " 'And if I recollect aright, Sir, I have formerly, in moments of unguarded conviviality, heard you say, that when you were a young man, and in the sea service you had yourself indulged this partiality for these monkey ladies'" (1792: 1997:329). These voices coming through reported speech by the letter-writers exemplify Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic advantages of the novel over other sorts of writing (Bakhtin:1981).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I discuss Bakhtin's theories in chapter 1.

Smith is not interested in having only her male letter-writers take up the political issues: she also gives Geraldine Verney the opportunity to make political comments at the very moment she arrives in France, dutifully obeying the call from her husband. Writing to her sister, she explains why some of the benefits of changes in France are slow to be felt:

We know, from daily experience, that even in a private family, a change in its oeconomy or its domestics, disturbs the tranquility of its members for some time. – It must surely then happen, to a much greater degree, in a great nation, whose government is suddenly dissolved by the resolution of the people; and which, in taking a new form, has so many jarring interests to conciliate (1792:1997:308).

Here she is using her own experience of the domestic sphere to help explain events in the public sphere. Smith has Geraldine become even more open about her interest in politics:

This excursion into the field of politics, where, for the most part only thistles can be gathered, and where we, you know, have always been taught that women should never advance a step, may perhaps, excite your surprise... Thus it might, perhaps, be said, that I determine never to think on any article (even on these, whereon my age and sex might exempt me from thinking at all) like Mr Verney; and therefore, as he is he knows not why a very furious aristocrat, that I with no better reason, become democrat (1792:1997:311).

However, she adds that she has reason for being a democrat and that is from conviction based on “principal, all that we owe to God, our fellow creatures and ourselves” (1792:1997:311).

In their introduction to the Pickering edition of *Desmond*, Antje Blank and Janet Todd claim that Smith produced “the romantic happily-ever-after texts that the publishers and the public demanded” (1997:xvii). In a way, *Desmond* is no exception. The hero marries the woman he is in love with. It could be argued that since this is how the novel ends, all this political letter-writing has simply been used to advance the sentimental plot. But the reader, in fact, is just as likely, after reading the novel, to be thinking about freedom and equality, as about love and living happily ever after. Furthermore, if the Terror proved some of Smith’s opponents to have been more far-sighted than she was, that does not detract from the way the structure of the epistolary novel has allowed her to take on certain discourses that she would have been less likely to risk in a third person narration.

Although *Desmond* is a more overtly political epistolary novel than many written by Smith's contemporaries, I have found several in the Corvey Archive where the overtly sentimental is nevertheless concerned with the domestic/public interface. Mary Favret, commenting on this interface between the domestic and the public, uses Jacques Louis David's painting of the death of Marat as a symbol of what letters can achieve (1793:Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts: Brussels).<sup>15</sup> In the painting, the dead Marat still holds a letter from Charlotte Corday. Here, Favret argues, "the emblem of isolation and vulnerability found itself in a powerful public space" (1993:1). Favret continues: "What the individual writes, the masses read, experience is translated from the private to the public domain, and back again" (1993:1). This translation between domains effected through the structure of epistolary novels is apparent in the next novel I examine, *The Life of a Lover* (1804) by Sophia Lee.

## 5. Sophia Lee's Use of the Sentimental Epistolary Novel at the End of the Century

If Smith is one of the novelists who lets the sentimental heroine stray into forbidden territory by allowing Geraldine a political voice, there are other novelists who are determined to return their heroines to the domestic sphere of home and garden, for example, Hamilton's treatment of Charlotte Percy in *Memoirs of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), referred to in section 3 of this chapter. I now examine Sophia Lee's novel, *The Life of a Lover*, published in 1804 but actually written much earlier, certainly well before the French Revolution. Lee has a purpose in publishing it at the later date because as she says in her preface:<sup>16</sup>

During the many years which these volumes have remained in my closet, such changes in nations, manners, and principles have been made as defy all calculation. The revolutionary system has pervaded literature, even in the humblest of its classes – novels (1804:viii).

She argues that the delicacy of women has been sacrificed to claims for equality by which women could only lose: esteem being no fair exchange for tenderness. She then attacks "the sturdy race of female argumentators who have sprung up of late years" for belittling "romance" and as she is unable to accept this system of writing

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix Plate 7.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to analyse the preface to Lee's epistolary novel in this chapter rather than in chapter 4 on prefaces.

by these more recent authors, she has decided to leave her heroine, Cecilia Rivers, just as she created her several years earlier (1804:viii).

She has no need to write this in her preface, since her use of the letter form allows her to put these very words in the mouth of Cecilia Rivers, when Cecilia decides to become an author and send her friend a literary production in one of her letters. Cecilia has received her information from an elderly retainer of the family she is writing about and defends herself to her friend thus:

Should you find anything romantic or improbable in the incidents, remember that I am not to be questioned but my old woman. Yet, when we look deeply into life, we shall, perhaps, find hardly any stretch of invention more singular than the scenes daily realising around us: nevertheless, if one idea not familiar to the mind, or in the scope of our own immediate knowledge, be presented to us, we all cry 'Romance!' yet recollect that this word is the most comprehensive one in the whole dictionary, as it includes every idea unknown to the person who pronounces it (1804:Vol.1:69-70).

She is arguing here for writing about everyday life, which will produce enough of romance to satisfy most readers. Her real concern, however, is her dislike of those "female argumentators" she mentions in her preface. She would rather have romance than their political philosophy. For instance, towards the end of the novel where Cecilia is writing to her friend, Amelia Forrester, about the difference between men's and women's feelings, she uses a political analogy which is much more likely to have arisen after the establishment of the republic in France than before. Men, she says, "enjoy all the advantages of a republic in the heart, while we languish under an absolute monarchy. Yet this difference would clearly convince me, that women enjoy most happiness, when happy at all" (1804:Vol.6:2). This image is perhaps not so curious for an English woman to adopt after the execution of the French King and Queen, although like many English writers looking for areas to lay blame for unacceptable behaviour by women, France under its absolute monarch is not a place which Lee recommends either. For her, it is a place of luxury and licentiousness where fallen English women might find shelter but where honest women had better be on their guard. She seems to be making a political point in order to highlight personal issues, and if so, it leaves the reader having to accept an "absolute monarchy" for women because that is where they have the best chance of happiness.



After many vicissitudes working as a governess and falling in love with her first employer, the married Lord Westbury, Cecilia Rivers decides to take employment as a companion to a Lady Killarney, unaware that she is a dissipated woman and former mistress of Lord Westbury himself. This job takes her to France, first to a convent, and then to the chateau of a French countess, which she describes as full of “boundless luxury” decorated with lustres, Gobelin tapestries and rich carpets (1804:Vol.3:71). Having admitted that there are many ladies in France with mind, manners and persons which the virtuous might copy, Cecilia nevertheless tells her friend Amelia that too many of their less virtuous manners have been imported into England and that she has learned that the Countess’s home is no better than a brothel and may lead to her own ruin. This is, indeed, what almost happens when Lord Westbury, released from marriage by the death of his wife, comes to search for Cecilia in Paris and thinks she must be a jilt and a Jezebel, as he later complains to his friend Trevilian, if she is in the company of the Countess and Lady Killarney. (1804:Vol.3:197). Back in England Cecilia keeps up her attack on the French when she reports how another lady, a Mrs Layton newly returned from France as well, “ridiculed our English mode of going to public places in couples”. Cecilia blames France for her companion’s “opera-glass survey and loud French criticisms” (1804:Vol.3:224); while by implication Lord Westbury does the same when claiming Cecilia is new to the “box-lobby train”(1804:Vol.3:241). The reader might be forgiven for thinking that the unbounded luxury of the French was at least partly a result of absolute monarchy.

For Cecilia/Lee, the only aspect of French civilisation that is acceptable seems to be the monarchy. Lee’s thinking comes very close to Edmund Burke’s in this respect (1790). In a similar vein, later in the novel, Lee uses Cecilia to voice an attack on Catholicism, in particular on nunneries. Cecilia writes to a former protégée, Miss Fermor, who having been seduced and left penniless in England, takes refuge in a convent in Paris. Cecilia manages to obtain an apology and a restitution of fortune from her seducer, Monro, on his deathbed and therefore decides Miss Fermor should break her vows and return to English society: being a nun, writes Cecilia, is a kind of “mental suicide” (1804:Vol.6:297). Convents may have been founded originally out of enthusiasm, but now are no more than conveniences, where the nobility can imprison their daughters. To be just to Lee, she does allow Miss Fermor a letter in

reply, refusing Cecilia's offer and suggesting the money should be used to set up an orphanage for young girls who are too well born to work, but too poor to keep themselves (Vol.6:304). An (English/Protestant) act of charity, we must assume, will make amends for having committed (French/Catholic) mental suicide. Lee does not accept the logical conclusion that if women are not to commit mental suicide their education may well lead them into arguing for the philosophies she dislikes.

However, the letter-writing technique allows Lee to use the voices of Cecilia Rivers and Lord Westbury to pontificate on human conduct and write long homilies to their friends on what makes a good marriage, particularly the woman's duty in marriage. For some of Lee's contemporaries, particularly the sturdy females whom she decries in her preface, many marriages would seem equally like mental suicide. Even Cecilia Rivers continues to write letters after her marriage and earlier, did not expect Amelia Forrester to share those letters with her husband, Mr Forrester: "I hope you are not letting your husband see my letters to you. Beware how you extend my confidence! It is the only thing on earth that could make a breach between us!" (1804:Vol.1:302). Cecilia recognises there may be tensions and admits to Amelia while discussing the marriage of their friend Sophia Harington, that domestic comfort depends on a knowledge that is impossible to have before marriage (1804:Vol.4:108). Nevertheless, she thinks it is important for girls to be educated in such a way that they can have a companionable marriage with their husbands, and is determined that her step-daughters shall be suitably educated (1804:Vol.5:49). For herself, she tells Sophia that she has managed to keep her husband's respect by avowing "ignorance in many principles of taste, many improvements in science; not to declare how willing I should be to avail myself of his superior information", though she hastens to add "I do not... appear so ignorant but that men of letters take some pleasure in my company." It seems here that Lee is recommending a certain amount of hypocrisy in educated women in order that they should not compete with their husbands. However, in her self-righteous way, Lee's heroine is proud of her participation in botanising: she and her husband go to Chelsea every morning to collect plant specimens so that their visitors may talk about them "from which I glean piety, virtue and knowledge...the sublime pleasure of befriending genius and storing up information" (Vol.6:148-9). As well as being content simply to "glean" knowledge rather than study in her own right, Cecilia/Lee does not threaten society like Richard Polwhele's "unsex'd"

Wollstonecraft (Polwhele:1798:line 64).<sup>17</sup> She is quite happy for the rural poor to stay poor and uneducated: “An outrageous vanity, which leads to a subversion of order, often grounds itself in persons who are half-instructed....Poverty becomes an evil only by comparison” (1804:Vol.4:351). At the same time she can offer her correspondent an example of rural piety in the story of Polly Brown, whom she has helped by persuading her husband to find a place for Polly’s unemployed lover, Thomas (1804:Vol.6:33).

The letter format of the novel allows Lee not only to make her views clear through the voices of her virtuous characters, but she also uses the dangerous apparatus of letters being intercepted, forwarded, lost, stolen and forged, to structure her plot, and to test the virtue and patience of her main characters. Her wicked characters such as Lady Killarney and Eliza Rivers are allowed one or two letters, but their punishments are also duly reported: Lady Killarney drowns in a shipwreck off the Irish coast without being able to confess her sins (1804:Vol.6:5), and Eliza Rivers’ final fate is not recorded but she might well have “mental suicide” forced upon her if she is ever released from the Kings-bench prison which is the author’s last reference to her place of abode (1804:Vol.6:370). Lee is aware that the letter is woman’s province and the bulk of the novel is made up of women’s letters with a few written by Lord Westbury. On one occasion when Sophia needs to write to Amelia Forrester because Cecilia, her regular correspondent is ill, Sophia writes: “Let me see if our friend’s little desk conveys any inspiration to me” (1804:Vol.5:295). Equally, receiving letters is important for Sophia. When she is pregnant she writes to Cecilia asking Cecilia to write back: “I mean to lay your letters under my pillow, as antidotes to the melancholy books and melancholy lectures which my kind mother will so generously lavish on this solemn occasion” (1804:Vol.6:74).

Letters are, of course, central to Cecilia’s life: they both destroy and save. After the forgeries perpetrated by Lady Killarney and Eliza Rivers, which have succeeded in

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Polwhele would allow this kind of botanising, since it does not unsex the female mind. If she had published this novel early enough, he could have included Lee with the females who passed his test such as Burney, More and Chapone (1798:lines 185-202).

estranging Lord Westbury, Cecilia is persuaded to write him a letter with a demand to know if she is released or not from her attachment to him. "Oh letter," she writes:

fraught with my very fate, arrive at some happy moment of satiety and regret. Recal to his mind the many which he has already received written by the same hand and make him all that he ought to be, by obliging him to know what he is. My whole soul is set upon this effort – this last, this only effort (1804:Vol.3:269).

This letter is enclosed in a letter to her friend Amelia, and so is Lord Westbury's cruel reply which Cecilia labels a "killing letter" (1804:Vol.3:269). Earlier when still in England, Cecilia is involved in a stagecoach accident, only to find the widow who has befriended her has stolen her belongings; she is able to report in a letter to Amelia that luckily the widow has not stolen her parcel of letters written to her by Lord Westbury. The innkeeper at the inn where Cecilia is lying in a delirium recovering from the shock of the accident, reads the letters and discovers they are from a nobleman, but even more luckily, Cecilia reports that she burnt the covers so her own identity has not been revealed, very important for Cecilia since Lord Westbury is still married to his first wife at this point (1804:Vol.2:321). This allows the innkeeper to contact Lord Westbury without Cecilia becoming incriminated in an illicit relationship. For all Cecilia's self-righteousness, she herself is not always beyond intercepting or reading someone else's letter. She first finds out about Lady Killarney, though not by name, by reading Lord Westbury's hidden correspondence. The irony is that she knows only too well that she could become caught in a web of secret, stolen letters, especially after returning to her own writing desk and finding a letter from Lord Westbury: "Alas what volumes of his correspondence might, perhaps, be collected! The most intolerable of all my pangs is, that, though I know these letters are such as no woman ought to wish to receive, I am grieving that they should ever have been addressed to any other than myself." She is aware that some other woman "may in turn, be lamenting my short, and, to her, invisible sway over him" (1804:Vol.1:266).

However, Cecilia retains the final ironical hold over the other characters by managing to write letters on her deathbed which are delivered after her death, the ones to her friend Amelia and to her husband with instructions for the education of her son and her stepdaughters. Lee then has her final comment in order not only to tell the readers

what happens to the rest of the characters, but also to explain how the letters come to be collected. It is because of Sophia's love for Cecilia that Sophia is "anxious to collect and arrange the letters here given" (1804:Vol.6:370). Besides collecting letters from her own and Cecilia's correspondents, Sophia manages to find some letters amongst Lord Westbury's brother's belongings after his death; and some she buys off Eliza Rivers who is in prison. The story of the first part of Lady Killarney's life earlier comes into Cecilia's possession when Lady Killarney carelessly leaves her memoirs, in the form of letters to Eliza Rivers, lying on a seat in the convent garden. They are found by Miss Fermor and given to Cecilia. The purloining and buying of letters appears to be quite consistent with virtuous behaviour, if the writers of those letters are wicked people. Lee suggests that, even if some of Cecilia's letters can be seen as self-incriminating, "the judgement which we pass on others, ought to be considered as the test of our humanity; since we impeach the goodness of our own hearts, if we do not doubt as long as doubt is possible" (1804:Vol.6:371). As if to ensure the readers judge the way Lee wants them to in Cecilia's favour, she finishes the novel with a monody full of praise for Cecilia's virtues written by Lord Westbury to his beloved wife (1804:Vol.6:371).

Cecilia is virtuous because she manages to control her passions. Lord Westbury, writing to his friend Trevilian shortly after his marriage to Cecilia, asks his friend not to discourse to him on the philosophy of happiness. He knows, he writes, that it consists for women in the right regulation of the passions, and for men in finding a rational discreet wife. He does admit, however, that "the trouble is men often make in women the very faults for which we condemn them" (1804:Vol.5:104). His solution for that is to find out as much as possible about the woman before marriage and then to "yield and sway" by turns. He then allows Cecilia, who has been standing over his shoulder as he writes, as if this itself is a symbol of a true marriage, to read what he has written. He comments to his friend: "we ought to be very frugal in the use of that treasure which we are obliged to spend a little of every day of our lives" (1804:Vol.5:104). It seems to be a matter of yield rather than sway for the woman. Cecilia writes to Amelia, how when she was envied by a woman whose husband committed suicide because he had gambled away all their money, she, Cecilia, replied: "Custom authorises his avowal of those feelings which custom obliges me to control... It is the interest of every woman, as soon as she is married, to weigh all that may curtail or

extend her enjoyments; and when I purpose going abroad, it is chiefly to endear the hour of return” (1804:Vol.5:181).<sup>18</sup> She admits that if Lord Westbury should take to gambling she would remonstrate with him, but very carefully (1804:Vol.5:181).

Smith’s *Desmond* (1792) is a much more subtle novel than Lee’s because Smith is able to balance Geraldine’s control of passions with her secondary woman character, Josephine, who gives in to her passions. However, Smith does not make Josephine an irretrievably wicked character like Lady Killarney. This is partly achieved by Desmond’s and Josephine’s illegitimate child being adopted by Geraldine and Desmond. The illegitimate child in Lee’s novel is the wicked Eliza Rivers, a characteristic, Cecilia claims, that her illegitimacy makes inevitable. Smith’s subtlety has allowed her to be more radical in her approach to women’s position in society. Lee, while relinquishing her chance to make her plot more subtle by delineating Eliza Rivers as a more rounded character, has at the same time made clear that there are limits to a woman’s independence: in the end she must yield to her husband. If Smith’s Geraldine is an example, as Watson argues (1994), of later “Julies” joining the ranks of the Jacobins, Lee’s Cecilia is a Julie where Rousseau thinks she ought to be – in her grave by the end of the novel: her transgressive thoughts indict her even if her actions remain pure. A compromise situation between Smith’s and Lee’s is to be found for the two/three heroines in Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch’s novel, *Truth and Fiction* (1801) which I examine in the next section.

## **6. Autonarration: Truth and Fiction in Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch’s *Truth and Fiction* (1801)**

Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch’s *Truth and Fiction* (1801) explores the situation of three women through their letters: the novel has a curious structure whereby the main part is a series of letters between two friends, Selina and Julia, with an occasional letter from another woman, Theodora, who writes to Selina and whose letters Selina forwards to Julia for comment. Theodora also includes a very long account written in the first person by an Italian whom she finds living in the cellar of the Welsh castle to which she has retired. The Italian’s story takes up over half the novel and it is from his account that the three women learn about the importance of controlling their

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<sup>18</sup> A Channel 4 TV programme, *Some of My Best Friends are Muslim*, interviewed a young Muslim woman who defended her husband’s right to polygamy in almost identical terms (17 August: 2003).

passions. It presents a novel within a novel and allows Selina and Julia to comment and to write poetry about his life. Theodora's story parallels Gooch's own life to some extent, while Selina's and more especially Julia's travels around England allow Gooch to compose what amounts to a travelogue of identifiable places and in some cases of identifiable people. The Italian's story is the fiction while the letters represent the truth, although readers recognise that both "fiction" and "truth" within a novel are fiction.<sup>19</sup>

In order to examine how Gooch structures the novel, I use the idea of autonarration developed by Tilottama Rajan in her analysis of Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). As Rajan explains:

Autonarration can be defined as a specific form of self-writing in which the author writes her life as a fictional narrative, and thus consciously raises the question of the relationship between experience and its narrativisation...Its use tends to put the writer in a female subject position (1993:159).

Emma's memoirs do the same work as letters because the memoirs are written specifically for Augustus, Emma's adopted son, so Hays has established this space for Emma to write out her beliefs. Within those memoirs Emma inserts several letters she wrote earlier in her life which make her beliefs as a younger woman stand out more clearly from the slightly more guarded line she takes as the older woman. Behind Emma, the memoir-writer and letter-writer, there is Hays the novel-writer. Hays, and as I argue, Gooch, though to a lesser extent, understand how to use this form for their own purposes. As Rajan says: "the epistolary form is a potentially transgressive discourse, crossing the bounds of private space so as to say what cannot be said in public, and claiming a presence and an immediacy that is impossible in narrative as an account of the past" (1993:153). Rajan argues that even if Emma's/Hays' purposes are not political to begin with they become so as she establishes herself as a writing and therefore political subject. "The writer in leaving the space of life for the text, ceases to be a transcendental ego and confesses her situatedness as a historical subject" (1993:159).

Gooch is a clumsier and more verbose writer than Hays but she has more or less the same purpose in writing her novel. Selina, Julia and Theodora are young women struggling with their passions, just like Emma, and they become, like Emma, writing

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<sup>19</sup> I examine the travel aspects of this novel in chapter 6.

subjects. Rajan borrows Julia Kristeva's (1984) ideas of the phenotext keeping the genotext in order (Rajan:1993:160). In scientific terms, the genotype is the genetic constitution of an individual while the phenotype is made up of the observable characteristics of the individual resulting from the interaction of its genotype with the environment. In *Truth and Fiction*, the phenotext is represented by the letters between the three women, and the genotext by the Italian's story. Julia and Selina discuss their relationships with men, and comment on the men whom they might or might not marry. The disastrous marriage of Selina's younger sister is told by Selina in contrast to herself who does not need to marry for money since her grandfather has left her an inheritance (1801:Vol.1:45). Later she tells Julia that she will not get married unless she really loves the man (1801:Vol.1:237). She confesses that she has been receiving letters secretly from a lover she met five years earlier (1801:Vol.1: 242). Julia is sorry to hear of Selina's troubles and says that the man who has been her lover, Ferdinand, has sent back her letters and she has now burnt them. Later after Julia hears that Selina's sister's husband has shot himself because of his debts, she writes a poem on the subject of suicide to send to Selina (1801:Vol.4:120). Julia's letters continue with comments on the difficulties of women, particularly in her own case because she has never had a mother to look after her and has been brought up by her aunt. Julia sends Selina another poem on the loss of maternal love. Julia's and Selina's final letters contain more comments on lovers and Julia admits that she loved Ferdinand but never esteemed him. She is now trying to forget Ferdinand and love Fenwick who is a friend of Selina's lover and someone she already esteems. This is what Julia learns from Antonio Genzano's memoir which she receives from Theodora via Selina. She is able to write her feelings down about that too in the form of a sonnet: "Yes I have read and trembling read/Genzano's tale of woe:/Each new emotion in my heart I dread/Lest it become a fatal foe/And direful evils bring on my devoted head" (Vol. 4:71). Julia and Selina learn from Genzano's story which itself is based on the experiences Gooch suffered in her own life.

Meanwhile, Gooch writes another side of her own life in the letters of Theodora, who like Gooch, is the daughter of a Jewish Spanish/Portuguese grand/father and an English Christian grand/mother. Gooch even gives her own names of Sara and Elizabeth to the mother and aunt of Theodora. Gooch's life is mirrored in that of Theodora, including a failed marriage, a spell abroad because of debt and a period in a



debtor's prison. Theodora has settled in an old abbey in Wales which will give her peace at last, partly because of the countryside and partly because she has access to books and is able to write her life in letters to Selina. After Selina's and Julia's marriage, she writes that she is glad they both seem to be happily married, but she will not quit her abbey. Instead, she will erect a memorial to Genzano and his sad memoir, which she has been given by Genzano himself before his death, since he was living secretly in the cellars of the abbey. Genzano's impossibly long narration of the events of his life also mirror the kind of society that Gooch moved in as she went between London and Paris looking for ways of making a living, working as courtesan, mixing with princes and the aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> According to Rajan, the autonarrative process has four zones of signification: first, the autobiographical pre-text which is non-discursive and which constitutes the real; the second is the public life of the author; the third is the phenotext, in this case the story as we have it in the novel; the fourth, the genotext, an area of "affect and signification" that is less to do with the plot or narrative than with the way we read the mental states of the characters lying behind the narrative (Rajan:1993:175). The writers of the letters and the memoir become extradiegetic narrators who are also characters in their own stories. There is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the real life people in the first and second zones with the characters in the third and fourth zones. As Rajan points out when looking at Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Darnford is both Imlay and Godwin so the process is not exactly autonarration. The same would be true of Gooch's novel, since Gooch herself is represented by Selina, Julia and Theodora, and it would be Selina's sister's husband who represents Gooch's husband; but the idea of autonarration nevertheless helps to explain what is transpiring in the novel and how both letters and memoirs make the elements of autonarration possible. The site of autonarration becomes the site where women novelists can assume an authority which they do not possess in society, neither in the pre-text nor in public life.<sup>21</sup> Gooch tried to access the public directly by writing an appeal about her

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<sup>20</sup> See Gooch's autobiography: *The Life of Mrs Gooch* (1792).

<sup>21</sup> This is a similar idea to Ballaster's discussed in chapter 2, where the author takes refuge behind her protagonist. But again, I argue that if the protagonist is weaker than the author (Emma Courtney loses her lover and has to warn her adopted son against the danger of the passions), then the refuge does not seem to be working.

personal situation and then writing her autobiography, but it is to be expected that her novels would have a wider appeal and reach a wider audience.<sup>22</sup>

Gooch also makes use of this strategy in her novel, *Fancied Events* (1799). The novel opens with letters from a Captain in Geneva but Gooch soon changes the narration so that the bulk of the novel is then told in the voice of Ellen, the main character in the novel. Ellen's audience is the reader: it is clear that Gooch needs Ellen to be writing her own life, which again reflects certain aspects of Gooch's life herself. Ellen, an orphan brought up by a peasant family just outside Glasgow, recounts how she eloped with the young Douglas Malcolm. Her elopement is revealed as more of a kidnap and she finds herself incarcerated in a room in an Edinburgh inn, wondering whether her former lover Duncan might have been a safer alternative. There is one moment in the narrative which highlights the ambiguity of letters, when Douglas shows Ellen a letter of warning from Duncan which makes Douglas doubt Ellen's sincerity. Ellen, however, is able to produce a letter she has just received from a stranger warning her against Douglas. In the end, she is saved from Douglas by a stranger, a Captain Boaden (1799:Vol.1:115).

Ellen's story continues in a way which reflects Gooch's life again with a spell in a debtor's prison, and a relationship with a Portuguese nobleman on board ship on her way to Bordeaux (1799:Vol.1:235).<sup>23</sup> When she is in France, Ellen receives letters from Captain Boaden who has gone to India and this allows Gooch to tell her readers something of life in India, not her own experience, but interesting for her readers. Gooch/Boaden does not think much of the people, but the commerce and industry are praised as is the beautiful countryside. However Ellen's subsequent stay in Bordeaux and then in Paris is once again a representation of Gooch's own life in France (*Life of Mrs Gooch*: Gooch:1792). In a desperate attempt to avoid a life of gaming and gallantry which Ellen/Gooch suffers in Paris, she goes to Switzerland. For a time this is a haven of "sincere friendship, elegant amusements and rational improvements" (1799:Vol.2:160), but Ellen's hope of money from her Portuguese connection and

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<sup>22</sup> Villa Real Gooch's appeal was made largely because of her financial predicament: *An Appeal to the Public* (1788). Her autobiography was published for similar reasons and because she had no friends, who could protect her: *Life of Mrs Gooch* (1792).

<sup>23</sup> Ellen's reading, both in Edinburgh and later, is itself an interesting reflection of Gooch's beliefs, examined in chapter 4.

from Captain Boaden come to nothing and she finds herself wandering through the countryside.

The novel ends once more in the voice of the Captain who finds Ellen in her wanderings. Boaden is confirmed as the Captain's son, and Ellen as Boaden's sister by an illegitimate relationship of the Captain's dead wife, Isabella. Eventually Ellen marries and receives her Portuguese inheritance (1799:Vol.2:202). Usually Gooch's heroines lead more successful lives than Gooch did herself. She can ameliorate the position of her heroines in a way she has no power in society to change her own position: her only power comes through the voice of Ellen narrating her story. In this instance, I would agree with Ros Ballaster's argument that the author, who is not protected in real life, has the protection afforded by her fictional heroine (Ballaster: 2000). Gooch is not the only novelist to use letters as a device within the third person narrative to protect her heroine. I examine some of these novels in the next section.

## **7. Letters as a Lifeline for Heroines in Non-epistolary Novels**

Gooch makes use of letters and first person narrative in *Fancied Events* to both forward the plot, and to enable her to write about distant places, but even more significantly to empower her heroine. So too do many other novelists, including Charlotte Smith in *Ethelinde* (1789), *The Banished Man* (1794), and *The Young Philosopher* (1798); Amelia Opie in *Adeline Mowbray* (1805); Alethea Lewis in *Disobedience* (1797), *Plain Sense* (1799), *The Microcosm* (1800), and *Rhoda* (1816); and Sarah Wilkinson in *The Mysterious Child* (1808). Very often the letter is the only recourse that women have when they are in difficult circumstances – the letter becomes a lifeline, or alternatively if the letter goes astray, the lifeline is broken. This is clearly seen in the epistolary novel, especially in Sophia Lee's *Life of a Lover* which I analyse in section 5 of this chapter.

Letters play an important part in the plot of Alethea Lewis's novel *Disobedience* (1797). Mary, whose mother Lady Caroline Seabright sends her to be brought up in Wales by two of her former servants, Richard and Eleanor, falls in love with a local farmer's son, William. When eventually Lady Caroline brings her daughter back to a life of luxury in London, she forbids Mary to correspond with William. After several of Mary's letters are intercepted by her mother, Mary manages to slip one into a pile

waiting for the postman, and she makes contact with William. She refuses to run away with him but when she refuses the marriage with her parents choice, Lord St Albans, Mary's parents have a plan to take her to Cumbria where they think William will not be able to find her and they can safely arrange her marriage to St.Albans (1797:Vol.II:183). Once in the Seabright castle in Cumbria, Mary finds she can still send letters as she makes the acquaintance of Agnes whose mother has been helped by Eleanor in previous years. Agnes agrees to send Mary's letter to Will, who in turn writes back with a plot to meet Mary at the garden door opened by Agnes. However, this letter is intercepted by Mary's father, and Mary is incarcerated more closely (1797:Vol.III: 44).<sup>24</sup> Mary's letter writing, which so far has kept her in touch with William, has not enabled her to escape from her parents. It is clear that letter-writing is important for women characters, especially when they are at risk from threats from parents and lovers whose intentions they want to resist. At the same time, these secret letters which are sent with the hope of relief, remain a site where heroines put themselves even more at risk. However, the next time Mary meets Will is not as a result of a letter but more or less by co-incidence.

Lewis allows her heroine to disobey her parents through writing letters, although she does not allow her heroine to marry outright against parental wishes. In her novel, *Plain Sense* (1799) the heroine, Ellen obeys her guardian's wishes and marries Sir William Ackland without loving him. She is much more interested in a childhood friend, Henry, whom she has to renounce because he has inherited a title. When Henry visits her, Sir William becomes jealous and plots to remove Ellen from Henry's company by taking her on a trip to Europe (1799:Vol.II:197). Eventually, Ellen finds herself pregnant and imprisoned in an old house somewhere between Dresden and Prague, which Sir William says is her punishment for her supposed unfaithfulness. He leaves her there and Ellen writes to him but finds that her jailer, Mrs Ulric, will not take the letter. Ellen gives birth to a daughter and after three months receives a letter from Sir William demanding the child. Ellen, unable to persuade Mrs Ulric of her innocence, writes another letter to her husband and sews it into the baby's clothes hoping that a letter arriving in such a fashion will change her husband's hardheartedness. The letter never reaches Sir William as it is destroyed when the

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<sup>24</sup> I examine the next set of events in this novel in chapter 5.

baby's clothes are washed (1799:Vol.III:103). Ellen escapes eventually and travels back to England but it is not letters that achieve this for her.<sup>25</sup>

Lewis is aware that letters can be dangerous and makes use of this in her novel *The Microcosm* (1800). Her heroine, Harriet Montague suffers various trials as the child of an errant daughter in the Percival family. Brought up in her cousins' household, she is belittled and often has her letters to her friend, Lucy Spencer, who lives nearby, intercepted by her jealous uncle and oldest cousin. Having fallen in love with Henry Seymour, her uncle's ward, she is separated from him when he goes to college and their letters are intercepted too. On one occasion the Percival governess is employed to set Harriet an exercise which consists of re-writing a letter taken from a novel in such a way that it appears to be turning down a lover. This exercise letter is then sent to Seymour as if it has actually been written by Harriet to him. The governess also gives Lucy a letter of rejection written by Harriet to Millemont, a man who tries to seduce her, and the governess pretends it was intended for Seymour. When, therefore, Millemont finally kidnaps Harriet, it looks as if she has eloped with him (1800:Vol.II:241). Millemont imprisons her in his house in London and she is not allowed to write letters (1800:Vol.III:100). Harriet is taken to America and eventually returns to England to find she is, in fact, Lucy Spencer's sister. There is indeed some more letter writing between America and England and between various members of the extended families in this novel but they are not used as part of the plot structure in the way Lewis uses them in the first part of her novel.

Like Alethea Lewis, Sarah Wilkinson in *The Mysterious Child* (1808) uses the device of a hidden letter to help her heroine to escape. Berthalina is kidnapped with her maid, and taken to a house where she discovers it is probably her supposed brother Lord Elwood who is responsible. She is desperate to write a letter to the Radnors, a family who have befriended her earlier, but her jailer Mrs Belton has obviously been told not to allow Bertha any writing materials:

Berthalina sighed and regretted the good old-fashion of wearing pockets, stored with pincushions, housewives, and above all, the pencil and memorandum book..... 'My grandmother would have sooner extricated herself from this dilemma than her modish offspring'..... She was worse off

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<sup>25</sup> I consider this part of the novel in chapter 5 where I discuss houses.

than Philomel, she had not even a sampler on which to portray the story of her woes (1808:Chapter 5: N.pag.).

Finally, Berthalina and her maid think of an ingenious idea. They find some old newspapers, cut out the letters and tack them on a piece of brown paper since they have access to sewing materials.<sup>26</sup> They manage to give this letter to Mr Pratley, the doctor, on one of his visits when Mrs Belton has gone to open the gate to a servant. He, in turn, obtains pen and ink and puts it in a basket which they let down from the window. His next letter is hidden in some flowers, and Berthalina's final letter to the Radnors is again given to Mr Pratley in the basket let down from the window. This letter arrives safely at its destination and the Radnors save Berthalina.

Wilkinson plans this double trick here on behalf of her besieged heroine, both in the 'writing' of the letter itself and in the sending of the letter, but there are authors who are prepared to satirise the letter, particularly a love letter, as Charlotte Smith does in *Ethelinde* (1787). She makes use of letters for her heroine to keep in touch with her lover Montgomery, but she is also prepared to mock the idea of a love-letter at the heroine's expense. At one point in the story, Ethelinde is staying with her horse-loving cousin, Ellen, and is brought a letter from Montgomery by Davenant, a man who has tried to seduce her several times. Davenant says he obtained the letter at the posthouse and he will hand it over to Ethelinde in return for a kiss. A servant saves Ethelinde from Davenant's advances, but in revenge, Davenant tears the letter into little pieces. Ellen, hearing of this, teases Ethelinde saying Davenant will write her another one: "why, one love-letter, you know is nearly as good as another; and I dare say, with taking scraps out of novels, and a little of Wollaston's {Ellen's husband} help, who is quite a dab at it, he'd produce you, now, in a day or two, his dictionary being well consulted, as pretty a love-letter as a sentimental miss need desire to read in an arbour" (1787:Vol.V:43). However, Smith concedes enough to Ethelinde's feelings to allow her to go out by moonlight and collect the pieces of the letter; and finally it is Ellen who is relegated to a barren existence with her horses, while Ethelinde eventually marries Montgomery. Here, it is as if Smith not only wishes to save Ethelinde's letter, but also wants to show that the novelist cannot afford to

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting here to compare this with Jane Barker's *Galesia*, for whom sewing and writing become interchangeable (in chapter 2), and with de Graffigny's Peruvian woman, for whom knotting strings is a way of writing (earlier in this chapter).

satirise her heroine's need to keep in touch with her lover through letters: otherwise there would have been no *Desmond* (1792).

Overall, the epistolary novel gives extra power to women novelists. It can work to their advantage because of the power of the letters themselves, which can represent the views of a range of characters, both male and female. Because there is often a complicit understanding between author and reader that the letters have been written by the characters themselves, and that the author has been no more than an editor, the letters affect the reader more powerfully. The epistolary novel allows women novelists to write at length giving viewpoints, both male and female, they might not feel able to produce in their own voices. At the same time, it allows women novelists to make the voices of their women characters more powerful. Since letter-writing is a domestic activity, both author and character can be admired for their writing, without running the risk of losing their esteem as women. The letters within the structure of the novel are written as private communications intended for one reader: the fact that those letters may then be read by numbers of readers buying the novel or borrowing it from a circulating library, changes the private nature of the letters in a very subtle way. It brings a very domestic activity, connected to female propriety, into the public sphere, enabling women authors and their heroines to circumvent the restraints imposed by male society.

## Chapter 4: A Women's Republic of Writers and Readers: Prefaces, Interventions and References to Books and Libraries

### 1. Introduction

The novels analysed in chapters 2 and 3 show to what extent women novelists were able to use their writing heroines, both those who write novels and those who write letters, as a way of protecting their own position as writers. Their writing heroines seem to have been less of a protection than I had expected they would be, either because their authors contrived that marriage should be more important than being a writer, or because their creators depicted society within the novel as belittling these heroines as writers. There were, however, other routes women authors could take to defend themselves as writers: a direct appeal to the reader, both in prefaces and in interventions in the narrative, bringing together both author and scriptor, to refer back to Ballaster's term for the narrator. In this chapter, I explore how women might strategically employ prefaces and interventions, not only to defend novel-writing, but also to explain their views on society in general. Their views on marriage and education for women lead them inevitably into constant reference to the reading and writing of books, and the part played in the lives of their characters by books and libraries. Sometimes books and libraries actually become metaphors for events in their characters' lives. Thus, they are contributing to the formation of a women's literary public sphere. In section 2 of this chapter, I analyse what *The Lady's Magazine* contributes to the debate on reading and the role of libraries. It is partly because of the constant attack on novels and circulating libraries in such magazines, that women feel the need to defend themselves as novelists in the prefaces to their novels. In section 3, I analyse the prefaces of books by Frances Burney, Charlotte Smith, Alethea Lewis and Helena Wells as examples of writers whose prefaces reveal their confidence as writers. By contrast, I also examine some prefaces by Sara Elizabeth Villa Real Gooch and Esther Holsten who make far more apologies. In section 4, I explore the opening interventions in the text where the author invents a narrator who can be defended or attacked: as in the case of Alethea Lewis' *Things by their Right Names* (1814), Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), Rachel Hunter's *The Schoolmistress* (1811) and *The Unexpected Legacy* (1804), and Charlotte Smith's *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1799). Section 5 examines three forceful uses of text by authors wanting to make statements about novels and wider



issues in society: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Helena Wells' *Constantia or the West Indian Maid* (1800) and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Section 6 examines further references to books and authors in Alethea Lewis' *The Microcosm* (1800) and *Rhoda* (1816) together with Sara Elizabeth Villa Real Gooch's *Fancied Events* (1799) and Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde* (1789): these references show how the novelists see themselves as part of a writing fellowship. In section 7, I examine two specific references by Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch to reading and circulating libraries. All these intertextual references to books and libraries bring the novelists and their readers into a knowing relationship with each other, which might be called a women's republic of letters or a women's literary field.

## **2. *The Lady's Magazine* on the Role of Reading and Libraries**

In this section, I analyse the way in which *The Lady's Magazine* contributes to the eighteenth century debate on reading and the role of libraries.<sup>1</sup> The dilemma of what to read fills issue after issue of *The Lady's Magazine* during the period 1790 to 1820; and by implication, this becomes a comment on what is being written. Romances and most novels remain on the danger list. The article, "Hints on Reading," referred to in chapter 2, regrets the number of books with nothing worth retaining, and which are only suitable for reading at the hairdressers. An unsigned article on books, in June 1790 (284), suggests readers do not need so many books: too many are published and there are now 50 readers where only thirty years before there was one reader, and many of these new readers are from the lower classes. These novels, presumably read by the lower classes, "with few exceptions are as devoid of taste, genius, knowledge of life, humour, wit, or pathos as they are pernicious to the understanding and unfriendly to the heart" (June 1790:284).

Generally, writers in *The Lady's Magazine* argue that all this is due to too much sensibility:

When a young girl by a long course of reading novels has acquired all that sensibility which they teach, she learns to despise the forms and modes of regular life, and in following her own inclinations, in giving a full bent to the

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<sup>1</sup> An analysis of attitudes to women writing appears in chapter 2. It is difficult to separate out attitudes to reading from attitudes to writing since a recommendation or a denunciation of the novel as something that is read, by implication involves the author who has written it too.

address of love, she persuades herself she is actuated by sensibility (July 1790:339).

While sensibility is a quality generally welcomed as an attribute especially of women, an excess is seen as dangerous. In the same month, there follows another diatribe against the damage done to young women by reading romantic novels:

the imagination, suffered to stray beyond the utmost verge of probability, where no vestige of nature appears, soon shuts out reason, and the dormant faculties languish for want of cultivation, as rational books are neglected because they do not throw the mind into an exquisite tumult (July 1790:363).

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Throughout 1790 and 1791 contributors remain vigilant. There are articles and letters about the dangers of novels and romances. In February 1791 readers are warned of “romances which in London spring up weekly like mushrooms” and are the principal reading of girls in boarding schools, particularly among twelve-year olds in London where the head and heart are corrupted (February 1791:74). In June 1791 a letter from a father to a daughter advises her to “allot certain hours of the day to reading, writing and translating, and transcribing from the best authors.” These would be “plain treatises of rational and practical divinity, well chosen books of devotion, and such as relate to morals, human prudence and good breeding” (June 1791:320). In October 1791 another letter from father to daughter warns young women against too much pleasure. “Novels and romances, a few excepted, and songbooks should be withheld from them as poison; they have been the ruin of thousands” (October 1791:520).

In March 1792 there is a long article on taste in reading. It begins with a quotation from François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1687), where he argues that the greatest difficulty readers face is in the choice of proper books (March 1792:133). This contributor damns both philosophy and romance: “the one may perplex your thoughts, the other infect the innocence of your mind.” On the other hand, History will help in conversation and poetry is good for the imagination. Young women can read the sort of philosophy in essays like those in the *Spectator* and *Rambler* but they should beware of novels as they will “vitate your style” and “mislead your heart and

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<sup>2</sup> They also think danger lies with the circulating libraries which make access so easy. I examine what *The Lady's Magazine* has to say about libraries at the end of this section. Cardiff Corvey research gives the example of Newman's Circulating Library in London for the period 1800-16 where they held 95% of all new novels published (Belanger, Garside and Mandal:2000).

understanding” (March 1792:134). Girls should use the expertise of friends to help them choose but above all they should beware of anything of the sentimental kind. With this kind of reading they will soon be “convinced that beauty and embellishment of dress, are of much less importance than the culture of the mind” and they will also be proof against the flattery and impertinence of coxcombs and gallants (March 1792:135). It seems clear from these letters that women are being encouraged into a certain kind of reading in order to become better wives, rather than better readers or writers. That is perhaps why the magazine offers women an account of the latest fashions at court, and, even during the war with France, pictures of the latest fashions from Paris. However, a more detailed analysis of the contents of the magazine shows a great deal of political material, such as reports from the battlefield and from the treason trials of Tom Paine and Horne Tooke (January 1795:9-15). An article in January 1795 continues this kind of admonishing of its women readers. It seems that the writers of these articles are entangled in the contradictions of their own arguments, advising intellectual study, as long as it is not the abstruse sciences, then admitting that there are many distinguished female writers, though these are known for works of the imagination. The final list of subjects to be studied includes biography, voyages, travels, and poetry, some history and geography and astronomy. Romance, however, is to be perused with caution (January 1795:16). Ironically, this article is followed immediately by an instalment of a romance called *Grasville Abbey*. The danger of over-romantic novels is highlighted by a contributor who signs herself Una. She complains (August 1795:369) that young girls need protection and refers to a novel called *The Clandestine Marriage* which had appeared in the magazine earlier in the year. The heroine of this novel is imprudent and disobedient but her behaviour is made to seem acceptable because she is beautiful. Una claims the author’s five-line warning at the end of novel is inadequate: “The danger which this pair were exposed to by a clandestine marriage should alarm those who are ready to tread in their steps; for few conclusions of such adventures are as happy as theirs” (May 1795:236). The letter-writer is convinced that the reading of novels may influence women into copying the unacceptable behaviour of the heroines in the novels they read.

A letter, signed Telemachus in May 1796, refers to reading being the “fashion of the present age” which produces the difficulties of knowing what to read. Novels can give instruction “which light minds will not seek for in more serious compositions”

(May 1796:253). Telemachus then refers to a novel called *Vicissitudes of Genteel Life*, supposedly by Mrs. Digby. He argues that the novel must be written by a man, because of the “justness and energy of the style.” If it is written by a woman, he asks her pardon and will “bow with true reverence to her too rare and admirable endowments” (May 1796:253). It sounds again as if Mrs Digby will be admired for her “justness and energy” as a writer but not esteemed as a woman. In a way, Telemachus is issuing a warning to women to avoid areas of writing and reading which are only for men. Women are put in a constant predicament. “Light minds” apparently cannot respond to serious writing, but light romantic writing will damage those minds. As if to endorse this view, a contributor in June 1798 wonders about the propriety of young ladies reading criticisms in different reviews. The suggestion seems to be that they will not know how to discriminate unless comments are given, in which case it could be useful. However, the contributor goes on to concede that “in an age like the present which has made greater advances in female education than any preceding, when the office of teacher has been dignified with the talents of a Genlis, a Lee, a More and a Barbauld,” there is nothing to fear (June 1798:260). As if to bear this out, the editors publish extracts from the writings of Priscilla Wakefield, Mrs Piozzi, Mrs Inchbald and Helen Maria Williams through the rest of 1798.

As if to refute this, however, there is a letter in March 1799, signed by C.C., which complains that writers have too much liberty, especially women:

In novels, indeed and in other works of imagination, we read of the cruelty of parents, bachelor uncles, and maiden Aunts; but so very scarce are those things in real life, that the writers of novels having nothing before their eyes to paint and describe, are obliged to go on copying from one another the manners of half a century old (March 1799:205).

The more liberty you give, this writer continues, the more women want. So the writer suggests there should be bolts on doors. The final suggestion is that crim.con could be avoided altogether by the provision of family barracks.<sup>3</sup> The issue, of too much liberty being afforded to women, is also faced in a letter satirising Mrs Prominent, a woman who is only partly educated and obviously not well read:

She arrogantly ventured to examine, distort, dissect and condemn even the most polished compositions. She raved in the most ungrammatical jargon

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<sup>33</sup> Crim.con or criminal conversation was the contemporary term, used by the legal profession, to describe a married woman being involved in a relationship outside her marriage.

against the language of modern writers; censured with unblushing effrontery the presumption of incompetent critics;..... while she perpetually quoted passages from a flimsy work which she had made up of fragments collected from all the bookstalls in the metropolis, declared there was not one female writer of the present era who had talents to compose a book completely original... (February 1800:63).

However, in an attempt to refute the Mrs Prominents of the world, the editors print some memoirs of Mrs Inchbald written by E.R. (July 1800:375). Here, E.R. sees Inchbald once again as an important woman writer, claiming that readers might compliment the advocates of the *Rights of Women* (sic), but they would do better to praise Mrs Inchbald. E.R. goes on to praise her particularly as a novelist, since novels are “sufficiently interesting and uncommon to excite surprise and yet sufficiently natural, and if I may so speak, domestic to come home to the bosom”(July 1800:375). E.R.adds that, since they keep within the regions of nature and probability, novels are distinguished from romances. This writer sees the influence of novels as benign: but, for good or bad, the fact that novels are influential is continually emphasised.

A few months later, a contributor damns novels once more because they mislead young women (September 1801:476). Nowadays, this contributor writes:

a young girl enters into the world with a novel in her head; she has made choice of her faults before she has any; her excuses are prepared and only await her errors; she sees in everything that can happen to her only one or two pages of an adventure which she has read, and she considers the reproaches which she may sustain as similar to those reflections which she passed over in the novels, and which she may in like manner pass over in life (September 1801:476).

This danger is reiterated when the editors print extracts from Elizabeth Hamilton’s *On Imagination and Taste* (June 1802:293). Hamilton argues that imagination on its own is of no value, and so the “dreams of fiction” are not adequate to develop imagination, which must be tempered by understanding:

An expectation that the same causes should always produce similar effects, will to the mind which has been exercised in fiction, be attended with the most fatal consequences..... the sensibility excited by fictitious representations of human misery being very far from that genuine spirit of benevolence which is actively exerted in alleviating the distresses which it cannot remove (June 1802:293).

Hamilton herself, of course, must have expected young women to be able to discriminate between fiction and real life or they would not have understood the satire in her own novels. A letter from Elvira in March 1808 sums up the predicament that fills so many of the pages of *The Lady's Magazine*. Elvira wonders why women who read should be sneered at. She writes that she has always preferred history and poetry to novels and romances. She rejects the title of female pedant. "Books and writing did not employ more of my time than work and drawing; yet I am reduced to the alternative of either parting with my library, throwing by my pen and joining in the fashionable disposition of routs etc. or for ever relinquishing all thoughts of matrimony" (March 1808:110). She finishes her letter with the anguished plea – so what do men want of women? Even the modest genius recommended by *The Lady's Magazine* seems to make her life untenable.<sup>4</sup>

*The Lady's Magazine* continues to be worried about the effects of novel-reading on women. In a series of articles in 1812 by a writer calling herself The Old Woman, there is a long contribution on "novel-reading and the mischief which arises from its indiscriminate practice" (May 1812:222). The Old Woman asks for immoral authors to be punished because they "inflame the passions." Even the perusal of a good novel is reprehensible if it gets in the way of a mother's duty (May 1812:222). A letter from a young lady some time later gives the awful warning of what happened when she was reading a horrifying Gothic novel late at night on her own; and one which had been obtained from a circulating library. She heard a crash on the piano and the candle went out; her sister, who was already in bed, came to see what had happened. In fact, it was only the cat that had caused the crash, but the young lady resolved in future "to read as few novels as possible" and only those that come with a recommendation (Feb.1813:77). There seems to be an increasing number of letters and articles condemning novels rather than defending them. Compared with the 1790s and early 1800s, between 1811 and 1815 the editors hardly refer to their intentions with regard to women writers and readers but from February 1813 they start a new column listing the titles of books received under general, poetry and novels. They make no comments, but during the last few months of 1814, they list thirty or more novels, over half of these being anonymous or by women. The list for

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to this recommendation in chapter 2.

April 1813 includes “Pride and Prejudice. By the author of Sense and Sensibility. 18s” (April 1813:200). In May 1814 they list “The Wanderer by the author of Evelina” (May 1814:243), and in June “Mansfield Park” is listed without any further acknowledgement (June 1814:291).

“This novel-reading and novel-writing age,” as Mr Radnor calls it in Sarah Wilkinson’s novel, *The Mysterious Child* (1808),<sup>5</sup> is kept alive by the circulating libraries. *The Lady’s Magazine* is acutely aware of both the advantages and disadvantages offered by libraries, particularly the circulating libraries. *The Lady’s Magazine* includes several reports on private, public and municipal libraries. In the home news section for October 1791, there is a news item about the King and royal family visiting the Weld family at Lulworth Castle. His Majesty apparently paid great attention to the library which contained upwards of 3000 of the most valuable books, bound with much elegance (October 1791:558). In December of the same year there is an anonymous letter on public libraries.

The advantages arising from the combined efforts of a number of individuals have been found very great in every branch of commerce, manufactures and literature. To such combinations we are indebted for the greatest part of our foreign trade, and our home manufactures; and for the surprising progress which has been made in literary and philosophical attainment in the present century (December 1791:645).

At this point, the letter-writer refers to the private sphere benefiting from this as well. “To extend these advantages to ..... private life, societies have been formed....for the purchasing of books to form a common library” (December 1791:645). This letter is a very good example of Jurgen Habermas’ (1989) description of how the public sphere arose as a coming together of individuals.<sup>6</sup> Libraries could be seen as the site where the public and private spheres intersect, since books are taken from the library, back into the domestic home to be read. The next point made by the letter-writer is to compare these public libraries with circulating libraries. The writer refers to the public library in Stockton where anyone can join and where members receive rational entertainment instead of the “nonsensical trash of the common circulating libraries.” The writer suggests that a library ticket would be a better present for a young lady than a ticket for assemblies, “and would be more likely to divert their minds from the

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<sup>5</sup> I refer to this quotation in more detail in section 4 of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> I discuss the coming together of individuals in chapter 1.

love tales and romantic nonsense called novels, than all the cautions of the more prudent mothers and cautious aunts in the kingdom” (December 1791: 645).<sup>7</sup> In an instalment on Benjamin Franklin’s life, the magazine also praises the public library in Philadelphia. This library, it is reported, is open to all, has 8000 volumes and is seen as a bulwark for liberty (December 1793:681). In 1796 (September:390) there is an account of Newcastle-on-Tyne, whose corporation received a gift of 6000 books as far back as 1714. They raise a rent charge of £5 per annum for buying new books. They have now built a new repository and raised a rent charge of £25 per annum to pay for a librarian. A month later, the editors print an extract from Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), where the letter-writer reports that in England young people are taught to read and write, but it is only used for reading “motley tales of love and murder of which care is taken to furnish them with an abundant supply from certain storehouses of trash called circulating libraries” (October 1796:453).

Circulating libraries receive the same treatment in one of the novels first published in the magazine. *Harriet Vernon or Characters from Real Life* (1807) is described as a novel in a series of letters by a lady. It opens with an attack on novels and circulating libraries: Harriet writes that, since she has no money for going out, she has:

subscribed to a circulating library and have set myself down to study novels..... From this kind of reading I have imbibed a romantic idea of love and unless a swain will die for me I shall never think him worthy of my concern. I know nothing of the world or of love, but if the descriptions given in these books are just it must be the most charming thing in nature to see the world and obtain admirers. I think I will read no more of them as I begin to be very discontented with my lot (January 1807:25).

Harriet may have her doubts about circulating libraries but she obviously continues reading for, in a subsequent instalment, Maria, Harriet’s sister, tells her during a discussion on the possibility of their going to a masquerade: “ ‘I dare say some of the novels you have been studying lately have furnished you with instances of damsels being decoyed away at masquerades’ ” (February 1807:67). One of Harriet’s friends

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<sup>7</sup> Some visitors might not even get as far as “nonsensical trash” in a circulating library: Charlotte Francis, niece of Fanny Burney, describes in her diaries how she and her friends visit the circulating libraries to take part in the raffles, rather than to find books (Colcough:2001). Charlotte and her friends may have been equally at risk from raffles as from trashy novels.



reports that her mother thinks she should be reading no novels apart from Richardson and adds: “ ‘I think a well-disposed mind would not be hurt by many of our modern novels but they certainly should not be made our chief study, more useful and instructive authors should claim our first attention’ ” (February 1807:67). Later in the novel, Maria reports to her sister that her lover Mr Beaumont has a former lover himself, a Miss Jones who has spent a “morning translating select passages from Epictetus in order to do that fine writer justice after the injustice done him by Miss Carter whose translation she held in contempt” (September 1807:467). Mr Beaumont confesses he has given up Miss Jones because her education suitable “ ‘to a learned profession had rendered her unfit for the society of her own sex and made her the burlesque of ours’ ” (September.1807:469). The author of this novel seems to damn equally the reading of novels and more serious books. It is partly as a result of these constant attacks that even the well-received novelists feel it necessary to defend their novels in their prefaces. I examine these prefaces in the next section. Prefaces offer women novelists a site where they can explain themselves as authors. Often, this is an apology for the writing, but I would argue that the apology is in fact a veiled way of establishing their right to be a writer: not a damning with faint praise, but a celebration with faint criticism.

### 3. The Role of Prefaces

Women make use of prefaces to establish themselves in the public sphere and justify themselves as novelists.<sup>8</sup> Prefaces are sometimes preceded by dedications in either prose or poetry and the dedications also allow women to say something about their writing. Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778:1982) has a dedicatory poem to her father, a further dedication to the authors of the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews* and this is followed by a preface. This is her first novel published anonymously. The anonymity has advantages and disadvantages for women. It allows them space without their having to think about accepted gender proprieties. On the other hand, if an anonymous woman writer is taken to be a man, this does not support the cause of women writers until the truth eventually becomes apparent. Of course, the use of the generic “he” disguises women even when they write under their own names.

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<sup>8</sup> Men novelists may feel the need to defend novels, but they do not need to defend themselves as writers. See, for example, Gilbert Imlay’s *The Emigrants* where, in the preface, Imlay refers to the accessibility of novels but where he takes himself as author for granted (1793:1998:1-4).

Burney's poem to the "author of my being" is important for Burney since her first attempt at a novel she destroyed in a bonfire, probably because her future stepmother did not approve of writing. The last two lines of the poem read: "Let not their folly their intent destroy;/Accept the tribute – but forget the lay." It is as if she is afraid her father might want to destroy her new novel. Burney refers to this in the dedication of her novel, *The Wanderer* (1814) to her father. By 1814 she can write about it openly and admit that she thought her father "would be foremost to aid, nay, charge me to shun the public eye" (1814:1991:3). Now she knows he will accept her place in "the republic of letters," which is the phrase she uses in the preface to *Evelina* (1778:1982:7). Nevertheless, she holds, in 1778 and in 1814, "political topics to be without my sphere." She says she will avoid speculation on the events of the French Revolution but will not avoid referring to them as "matters of fact." A novel must be able to deal with both the "noxious or reprehensible" as well as the "salubrious or chastening" (1814:1991:6). She knew, even in 1778, that novels would continue to be written, so it seemed best to make use of them. Burney fought for that space all through her novel- (and play-) writing career. She knew there were limits but she wanted to assert her rights to the space within those limits. So in the dedication of *Evelina* to the authors of the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews* she asks for their "lenity; your examination will be alike unbiased by partiality and prejudice; - no refractory murmuring will follow your censure, no private interest be gratified by your praise" (1778:1982:4). Her critics could not know immediately that this appeal was from a woman rather than a man.

Once Burney has her father's approval, she is prepared to be seen by "the public eye" in "the republic of letters" as a woman. A writer who did not have to wait for parental approval is Charlotte Smith. Her first novel, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1789:1987) was published under her name with a dedicatory poem to her children. It was of course her need to make money for them that led her into novel writing. However, in some of her later novels she did find it necessary to write a preface in which she could say something about the writing of novels and defend herself from some of the criticisms levelled against her. I refer briefly to her preface to *Desmond* (1792:1997) in chapter 4 on epistolary novels and I analyse it in more detail here. She not only needs to ask for the indulgence of readers, because of her "doubts of succeeding so well in letters as in narrative" (1792:1997:5), but she also needs to

defend herself against possible critics of both her morality and her entry into the field of politics. She fears that she might be criticised for creating a male character who falls in love with a married woman. Even more, she fears the critics who might accuse a woman of entering the political sphere which they have no business with, and which might prevent them from being good wives and mothers: “Knowledge, which qualifies women to speak or to write on any other than the most common and trivial subjects, is supposed to be of so difficult attainment, that it cannot be acquired but by the sacrifice of domestic virtues, or the neglect of domestic duties” (1792:1997:5). She immediately follows this with an answer: “I however, may safely say, that it was in the observance, not in the breach of duty, I became an Author”. By this she means her duty to look after her children and as she adds, the things she had to do for them, presumably in talking to financiers and lawyers, “introduced me to those scenes of life, and those varieties of character which I should otherwise never have seen” (1792:1997:6). In further defiance of those who would “exclaim against the impropriety of making a book of entertainment the vehicle of political discussion,” she says she is prepared for their criticism. She also has to defend herself against those who might claim that she should not be writing anything that looks like a defence of the French. But, she claims, the “slight skirmishing of a novel writer” can have no effect on that degree of prejudice (1792:1997:7-8). This is irony: she must realise that political novels can well have more effect than a slight skirmish would. This kind of writing has much the same ironic ring to it as Jane Austen’s defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey* (1809).<sup>9</sup> The preface to *The Banished Man* (1794) refers to some of the same issues. Less explicitly political, its politics have changed and become critical of the French Revolution, but Smith still needs to excuse herself: “I still think however that no native of England could help *then* rejoicing at the probability that the French nation would obtain, with very little bloodshed, that degree of freedom we have been taught to value highly” (1794:x). However, her preface mainly confronts her problems as a writer. Again she belittles the novel calling it “so trifling a composition”, but nevertheless defending herself against the critics who accuse her of using incidents from her own life. Just as “a landscape painter derives his predominant ideas from the country in which he has been

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<sup>9</sup> I analyse Austen’s defence of the novel in the section on authorial interventions in the text of the narrative.

accustomed to study – a novelist from the same causes makes his drawing to resemble the characters he has had occasion to meet with” (1794:x). The character of Mrs Denzil is based very much on her own experience as a writer.<sup>10</sup>

Smith repeats this argument in her preface to *The Young Philosopher* (1798) where she refers to a fable about the sheep being the most able to write about being a victim because it is the most victimised of animals (1798:1999:5). Likewise, she has suffered most “from oppression, from fraud, from chicane” and so she can best describe it in her novel (1798:1999:5). She also defends herself against possible charges of plagiarism since her novel contains a section on a madhouse and she does not want to be accused of copying Wollstonecraft’s *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). Her final point is to take issue with those who say the only kind of novel worth writing is not one that contains the “possible”, but must have the “wild, the terrible and the supernatural.” She also refers to the question of a moral: she hopes she has shown the importance of parent-child relationships and the dangers of too much sensibility; and the “perpetration of wickedness” which once was carried out by ogres and magicians and now by men in contemporary society. Finally she refers to her inclusion of natural history and some poetry as ornaments to her novel (1798:1999:6). In all these prefaces, Smith establishes her right to the space of the novel for her own purposes.

She continues this in the preface to *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1799:1800) where she reports that “much has been said of the inutility and the danger” of novels. She claims that any “young woman who is so weak as to become in imagination the Heroine of a Novel, would have been a foolish, frivolous and affected character, though she had never heard of a circulating library”(1799:1800:vi). She will not allow that novels are useless even if they are not pernicious. She suggests that young people can learn geography and natural history from novels. Her preface has given her the opportunity to say something positive about novel-writing, and she uses the letter format of her text to say more within the novel.<sup>11</sup> Her prefaces defending the novel make sound arguments in response to those who write about the danger of novels in *The Lady’s Magazine*.

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<sup>10</sup> I refer to this in chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> I analyse this further in the next section.

Burney and Smith are robust in their defence of the novel: it is their province, as Alethea Lewis claims and they are sovereign (Lewis:1797).<sup>12</sup> Julia Epstein, in her book on Burney, quotes a critique of Burney by Thomas Macaulay which uses similar language. “She vindicated the right of her sex to an equal share in a fair and noble province of letters. Several accomplished women have followed in her track” (Epstein:1989:222). Earlier Hazlitt accused Burney of occupying a space with nothing in it. Hazlitt’s accusation is also quoted by Epstein to show how he misread Burney’s intentions in her novels. Reviewing *The Wanderer* (1814), Hazlitt writes: “The difficulties in which she involves her heroines are, indeed ‘Female Difficulties – they are difficulties created out of nothing’”(Epstein:1989:212). As Epstein points out, these female difficulties are not “nothing” for women, or rather they are the nothing of which their lives are made up, which “endangers women’s lives in burning houses and traps them under falling construction materials.” These are the literal places where women often find themselves.<sup>13</sup> Writers who follow in Burney’s track, to use Macaulay’s metaphor, include Alethea Lewis, although he might not have included her among the “accomplished”. However, her preface to *The Microcosm* (1801) is another staunch defence of the novel. She admits to “emolument” not being a “subordinate consideration,” but says her prime purpose is to instruct young people in Christian precepts, and the only way to do this is by writing novels since the young do not wish to read moral essays. She then refers to the “fabrications” of Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Smollett, Hawkesworth, Goldsmith and Johnson; and then continues her list of fiction writers with Cervantes, Moliere, Le Sage, Fenelon, Rousseau, Voltaire, Homer and Virgil: “were not their most choice sentiments and important precepts delivered in the words of an imaginary hero?” (1801:vi-vii). It is ironic that she does not mention any women fiction writers at this point. She refers later indirectly to Burney when she refutes the accusation that she has copied from the author of *Cecilia* or *Evelina*. But, she adds, only “little critics” would say that. She agrees with possible critics that novels which render vice enticing or which “lead the puerile heart to entertain romantic ideas, ought to be reprobated in the severest

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss this statement by Alethea Lewis in the section of this chapter, which deals with authorial intervention in the text.

<sup>13</sup> I examine safe and threatening places, which, for example, constantly threaten Miss Ellis in *The Wanderer*, in chapter 6.

language.” However, she claims, only pedants and cynics would criticise novels which “draw the mind to love and to practise not only the gentle but severer virtues” (1801:vii). Lewis realises that the novel can be used for encouraging the young to behave according to Christian principles.

By comparison with Lewis, Helena Wells is unsure at first, but becomes more convinced of the importance of her own contribution to the debate about novels as she moves from first edition preface to second edition preface to her novel *The Stepmother* (1798 and 1799). She refers to the first edition of her novel as “the humble essay of a nameless individual” and wonders how she may be expected to find readers. She also admits that people who have suffered tend to turn to writing and therefore appeals to her reader to think kindly of authors. A year later, she is more interested in the purpose of her writing and not worried about having to promote the victim status of authors. She comes nearer to Lewis’ purposes when she states boldly that she wishes “to counteract the pernicious tendency of modern philosophy and to check the taste for the marvellous and horrible” (1799:v-vi). With reference to the latter, she says she does not wish to detract from “the lady who does it so well”, meaning, no doubt, Ann Radcliffe. Considering her references to modern philosophy in *Constantia Neville or the West Indian* (1800), I would imagine she is thinking of Wollstonecraft’s “pernicious tendencies”.<sup>14</sup> She emphasises the responsibility of novelists by pointing to the ever-increasing number of readers: “As a friend to the rising generation I should be anxious to keep from them such false views of society and manners”(1799:vii). She reiterates this viewpoint in the preface to the first edition of *Constantia Neville or the West Indian* (1800), where she writes: “I am not without hope that its moral inculcations, and general tendency to promote the exercise of the active virtues, will entitle it to some degree of attention from those who are in general but little disposed to think favourably of any work that appears in the form of a novel” (1800:iii). She argues that if young women are only going to read novels, then “it is incumbent on those who employ the pen with a view to their edification, to avail themselves” of the novel (1800:iii-iv). She was obviously successful because her book went into a second edition only four months after the first edition. The

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<sup>14</sup> See below in section 4, where I refer to her criticism of Wollstonecraft’s life rather than her novels.

preface to the second edition is much shorter and refers to “entertainment” rather than “domestic instruction”: it is clear that for her the two aims go together.

An equally strong defence, but on slightly different grounds, is made in the advertisement to Sydney Owenson’s novel, *Florence Macarthy* (1819).<sup>15</sup> The writer of the advertisement, in which Owenson is referred to in the third person, is at pains to appeal to public opinion on behalf of Ireland. “The Irish have been accused of making an ostentatious display of their injuries, and of clanking their chains to excite compassion,” they claim but add that if writers keep quiet, it seems like tacit approbation” (1819:Advertisement:n.pag.). The criticism of chain-clanking on behalf of Ireland could be applied to chain-clanking by many women novelists on behalf of the novel; or on behalf of women oppressed by society; and subsequently demolished in similar fashion: “It is impossible to speak of Ireland, still less to take it as the scene of a narrative, without frequent allusion to its starving, squalid and diseased population.” That is why “she (the author) has found materials for another Irish story” (1819:Advertisement:n.pag.). In the case of *Florence Mccarthy* (1819), the advertisement, whoever it is written by, acts as a defence for the kind of novel Sydney Owenson is writing.

By contrast with writers such as Burney, Smith, Lewis and Wells, there are other women who are less sure of their place as novel-writers in the republic of letters. In *The Wanderings of the Imagination* (1795), Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch produces something of a cross between fiction and reportage. After her autobiographical attempt, *Life of Mrs Gooch* (1792), she decides, she says in her preface to *The Wanderings of the Imagination*, not to choose the novel which takes a long time to write and at which “so many of my fair countrywomen excel,” but to settle for reflections on her travel and reading which will be no less entertaining than if she was writing fiction (1795:ix). With her first novel, *Fancied Events* (1799) she uses the preface to comment on the use of prefaces. She admits that it is worrying about the reception of their work that makes authors write prefaces and they are therefore “apologetical” in tone, but nevertheless prefaces constitute a part of “literary good-

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<sup>15</sup> I analyse the way Sydney Owenson has made her main woman character a writer, in chapter 2 on characters who write.

breeding.” She knows the prefaces are often not read and then when the critics come to write about the book in question, they accuse the authors of not doing what they did not set out to do. She then tells the reader what she is not going to include:

“surprising adventures on every page, intermixed with horrible descriptions, and headed by a ghost” (1799:vi). She will follow Nature but then she has to admit that the critics are not agreed on what Nature is. As for herself, she maintains she has written a simple tale and she will be disappointed if “it comes not to the heart” (1799:viii). Because life has treated her badly, she counts herself among the many authors, both male and female, who pour out their sufferings in their writings. Rather than taking such writers to task for doing this, she excuses them by asking more fortunate authors not to “wound by ill judging criticism and the severity of reproach” (1799:xi). She extends this position of the unfortunate author into the first chapter of the novel, where she becomes the unfortunate narrator who receives a letter from a Captain S., who, in fact, is also a character in *The Wanderings of the Imagination* (1795:11).

She refers again to her situation in the preface to her next novel *Truth and Fiction* (1801) where she says she began her writing career with a “melancholy recital of plain unvarnished Truth” (1801:xv), and since “I am very far from arrogating to myself the possession of first-rate talents as a Novel-writer, I solicit the protection of general candour, and submit with cheerfulness to the decision of critical urbanity” (1801:xvi). However, in spite of this apparent lack of self-esteem, she has earlier in the preface, set out what she thinks a novelist ought to be doing. She is not pleased to see that a return to the “ages of gothic barbarism, of chivalry and romance” has now been replaced by novels of scandal. It is the duty of a novelist “to discriminate and not to disgust... to descend to the lowest of the canaille, and initiate the fair reader in that vocabulary, of the existence of which, she ought not to have any conception, is surely neither useful nor amusing” (1801:x). Novelists, painters and dramatists alike must be careful not to “defile their work with the obnoxious” even if they are striving to convey Nature as she is. She hopes in her present novel she has “tempered truth with fiction.....without violating probability, or wounding veracity”, and she hopes she has done this with variety as well (1801:xii).



By the time of her last novel, *Sherwood Forest* (1804), Gooch returns to complaining about authors' difficulties. She claims that a good novel-writer must have suffered "miserable experience. An author, who has never trod the beaten path of adversity, can scarcely be denominated such; for poverty, in this as it is called, enlightened age, treads upon the heels of genius; and anticipates every progressive step by rude assailment, and by the scorpion sting of acute recollection" (1804:ix). She reckons there have not been many fortunate authors since "so little *private* encouragement is given to this *public* literary subject" (1804:ix). She is trying to include all novel-writers with herself though her line of argument is contradictory, since the logical conclusion would have to be that if authors received more "private encouragement", they might consequently not have adequate "miserable experience." Gooch dedicates her novel to James Wardell, a wine merchant, who she says helped her financially and "raised me from my bed of death." Amongst her relations and acquaintance she has not "*one* FRIEND" (1804:viii). There are some echoes here of Charlotte Smith in her preface to *The Young Philosopher* (1798), but if Smith and Gooch share a certain amount of enjoyment in being victims, Gooch has less conviction about what her novel may achieve. She submits it "with all respect and deference to public criticism, and to public urbanity" and her final plea is that it may give pleasure since it is about "SHERWOOD FOREST" and written by a "SHERWOOD FORESTER"(1804:xii). She is more concerned with her own needs than Lewis or Wells and there is only indirect reference to her hope of instilling religious principles in her readers. Her use of italics and capitalisation only seems to underwrite her uncertainty. Other writers protect the space of the novel as their own by inventing a pretend preface, which becomes part of the opening of the novel, and this is what I examine in the next section.

#### **4. Authorial Intervention instead of a Preface**

Perhaps the idea of putting their purposes in writing into the first chapter, rather than into a preface arises out of that same conviction that the novel is a writing site that women can claim as their own. On the whole, they do not want to write treatises and tracts, and they are afraid young readers would not read them if they did. Young readers are probably only too ready to skip prefaces. Alethea Lewis uses the device, defending her position as author in the first chapter of the novel *Things by their Right Names* (1814). She opens the first chapter by declaring that her ruling passion is to

be useful and then goes on to pretend that the narrator is a man, claiming that if she was a woman she could use her distaff but as a man she can use her pen. "I could do this in periodical essays, in weekly sermons, in evening lectures, in a poem, a play, a pamphlet, all no doubt, equally well," but as she wants to make it palatable she will write a novel (1814:Vol.1:3-8). The narrator then begins the story of the Pynsynt family. Lewis' narrator returns to the commentator mode at the end of the novel with a reference to patterns of meekness, humility and moderation (1814:Vol.2:284) In this way she has incorporated her defence of the novel within the narrative structure.

Rachel Hunter constructs her novel, *The Unexpected Legacy* (1804), in a similar way, in the form of a conversation between herself and a fictitious author, by the name of Mrs Sedley, and a male visitor, who is allowed to produce many arguments against novel-writing so that in the end Mrs Sedley/Mrs Hunter can in turn demolish those arguments. While Mrs Sedley takes up her knitting, he tells her there is no such thing as a good novel for "those which are merely *harmless* can have no claim to that title, and those which are *dangerous* are positively bad" (1804:2001:1). Even the so-called "*very best*" novels, he says, only make the reader whom he refers to as female, view "the real scenes of life through a false medium" (1804:2001:1). He attacks the sensibility of the character, Julia de Mandeville; the horror in the *Forest of Fontainville*; the *Simple Story*, or the tears produced by an Evelina, all of which are based on Fancy while Reason is dismissed. As a result, the female reader is unable to accept the ordinary life of a wife and mother. That is bad enough, he claims, and then asks what is to be said for "some modern publications circulating amongst us, in which genius is debased with the jargon of metaphysical pride and subtilty, to the purpose, as it seems, of poisoning the vital springs of life" (1804:2001:1). Mrs Sedley agrees with him about these "justly reprobate dangerous novels," but defends the good novel on the ground that his objections "rest solely on the weakness of the reader" (1804:2001:2). She thinks a good novel can "furnish employment for the mind" which in itself is an antidote to the increase in opulence and ease; and if it gives enjoyment, then it is worthwhile. "In all ages of literary knowledge and human improvement, it has been the study to allure curiosity to the school of morality by means of fiction" (1804:2001:3). Mrs Sedley says she has seen disobedient daughters who have not read novels, and unhappy and weak women among those who think novels are sinful. She can see no harm in "the works of those women in

particular whose lives are the best commentaries on their books” (1804:2001:3). This sounds very much like an attack on Mary Wollstonecraft whose life she would not have approved of. When Mrs Sedley’s friend offers to come with a recipe for writing an acceptable novel, she replies that she has already written one, which at first she refuses to show him, because he has spent the last fifty years unable to sleep “without an anodyne prepared from the circulating library” (1804:2001:4).<sup>16</sup> She does however let him read her manuscript and he returns it with some quotations from “*Les Lettres Juives*” which praise the return to good taste among novel writers: “au lieu du surnaturel on veut du raisonnable; et a la place d’un nombre d’incidents qui chargeaient les moindres faits, on demande une narration simple, vive, et, soutenue par des portraits qui nous présentent l’agréable et l’utile” (1804:2001:1-4).<sup>17</sup> Rachel Hunter has made sure that Mrs Sedley wins the argument over her male visitor’s objections to novels, but equally she has insured herself against criticisms that might condemn the novel because of the scandalous life of the author.

Charlotte Smith has a similar device to defend the novel when she assumes the voice of a male narrator in *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800).<sup>18</sup> The structure of this text depends on the letters written by the fictitious male narrator to a fictitious friend. The narrator is able to refer to writing as well as to his wanderings and to relate the stories he has heard during his rambling life. By the last volume of the novel, the narrator has fallen in love with one of the characters whose story he is telling. Smith allows her narrator to satirise Gothic novels as he writes to his correspondent about how his letters will contain:

perpetual description, little narrative, and still less character. My hills will boldly swell, any woods wave over as many nightingales as I can collect, my castles frown, and my streams fall, or murmur, or glitter, as luxuriously, and as frequently, as if I were the wandering and persecuted heroine of a modern novel in the very newest taste (1800:Vol.1:3).

When the narrator is ready to write the first of the stories he has collected from local people about Edouarda and her family, he has to explain how he “came to be so well

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<sup>16</sup> It is unusual to have a woman criticise a man for spending too much time reading novels from circulating libraries.

<sup>17</sup> “instead of the supernatural we want the rational; and in place of a great number of incidents which count for very little, we want a simple narrative, lively and supported by descriptions which present us with what is pleasant and useful.” This quotation is presumably from *The Jewish Letters* by the Marquis d’Argens (1738).

<sup>18</sup> I refer to this novel in the previous section in order to comment on Smith’s preface.

acquainted with the characters of these people, as to be able to relate even what they said, and how they thought” (1800:Vol.1:29). The answer lies in invention, he assures his correspondent, true for epic writers of the past and for “the composers of the memoirs, novels, tales, and romances, of which the present period is so fertile” (1800:Vol.1:29-30). Here the structure of the novel, the plot and Smith’s interventions in the voice of the male narrator are all used in the defence of the novel: a novel which avoids Gothic excess, but nevertheless supports the real experience of the author/narrator with the technique used by every writer, invention.

Lewis, Hunter and Smith do not have the same political or social beliefs, but they have all used a similar narrative device to defend the writing of novels. Many novelists, whether they have an advertisement, or a preface or neither, use their text as a way of defending the novel and with it their beliefs about society in general. Sometimes they interrupt their narration to do so and sometimes they put the defence in the mouths of one of their characters. I examine this method of defence in the next section.

## **5. Authorial Interventions and Characters as Mouthpieces in Austen, Wells and Hamilton**

I have chosen Jane Austen, Helena Wells and Elizabeth Hamilton as three examples of the author interrupting the narrative, or arranging for one of their characters to give an opinion that the reader can recognise as belonging to the author. These interventions are often in defence of the novel but at the same time may be linked to other issues, as for example where Alethea Lewis defends her right to include whatever she wants in a novel, even if it interrupts the narrative, and she then proceeds to deliver a homily against slavery. The implication here is that women’s position in marriage is often no better than that of slaves (*Disobedience*:1797).<sup>19</sup> I now analyse in more detail those comments which come directly from the author/narrator or from the mouths of characters but often in these cases it may only be a device for the author to make her own point. Perhaps the best known direct comments by the author are Jane Austen’s ironic remarks in *Northanger Abbey*

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<sup>19</sup> I analyse Lewis’ intervention in more detail in chapter 5.

(1818). In this section I make a short reference to Austen and then look in more detail at Helena Wells and Elizabeth Hamilton.

Austen's narrator takes the reader into her confidence and shares the satire with the reader. The first sentence, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (1818:1995:13), makes it plain that Austen means – the heroine of a novel. Austen continues with this kind of playfulness when she introduces Mrs Allen: "It is now expedient to give some description of Mrs Allen, that the reader may be able to judge, in what manner her actions will hereafter tend to promote the general distress of the work" (1818:1995: 18). This approach reaches its height when Austen describes how Catherine and her friend Isabella stay indoors on rainy days in Bath to read novels. Austen will not, like some writers do, prevent her heroine from reading novels. Novelists, she claims, must appear united in the face of reviewers and those who decry the capacity and undervalue the labour of the novelist. Austen laughs at the young lady who says, when asked what she is reading, it is only a novel and then might name *Cecilia* and *Camilla* by Fanny Burney and *Belinda* by Maria Edgeworth. Continuing in satiric mode, Austen adds "or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (1818:1995:13).<sup>20</sup> Women novelists are aware of the community they belong to: Austen specifically mentions two women novelists. Apart from this direct defence of novels, *Northanger Abbey* could be considered a meta-novel since its structure, events, and dialogue are all self-referential (Butler:1995). What is interesting is that Austen is only one of many women novelists who write in this way, perhaps not as subtly as Austen, but fully aware of the usefulness of intertextuality, the implicit and explicit references not only to novel writing and to other novels but also to issues of women's learning and education. Austen, like many other women novelists, refers to books, learning and social issues, evidence of how women are able to use the novel to make statements about issues that relate not only to the domestic sphere, but also to the public sphere.

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<sup>20</sup> It would be difficult to think of a better way of defending the novel and it is a shame to realise that readers had to wait thirteen years before they could read what Austen had to say, since the novel was written in 1805 and published in 1818.

Helena Wells is able to bring public issues into a novel about domestic concerns in *Constantia Neville or the West Indian* (1800). It tells the story of Constantia brought up in Barbadoes and then at the age of twelve brought to England to escape the company of “negroes”. Wells interrupts the narrative to defend her position on Constantia’s education and then promises the reader she will not interfere in the novel again (1800:Vol.1:132). However, not many pages later she teases the reader, satirising Gothic fiction with: “Why there is not an old castle to be pried into, or a rusty key found, nor a pretty description of anything we have never seen the like of, in the whole book” (1800:Vol.1:171). A few pages later again, Wells makes an appeal to the reader for help in establishing places for impoverished gentlewomen where they can find an asylum for industrious work (1800:vol.1:192). When Constantia goes to Sussex to live with the Rochfords, she loves the countryside and sees it as a proof of the existence of God. Wells quotes from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters from a Short Residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark* (1796) from Letter viii: “I pause again breathless.....my sight pierced the fleecy clouds that softened the azure brightness.....I bowed before the awful throne of my Creator” (1800:Vol.1:221). Wells follows this with a quotation from St.Pierre who describes the “savages of America” who see Gods everywhere, even in a flint” (1800:Vol.1:221).<sup>21</sup> However, Wells is not an uncritical admirer of Wollstonecraft and when Lord Rochford, a married man, declares his love to Constantia, Wells uses the example of Wollstonecraft’s life as opposed to her writings to highlight unseemly behaviour. Wells quotes from *Letters* again, this time Letter xvi where Wollstonecraft describes womanly and motherly thoughts, but Wells immediately follows this with strong criticism:

A love of false hypotheses, a wrong bias, associating with men of profligate habits and corrupt principles (for many such were, from their literary fame and the complexion of their politics admitted to the society of Mrs Wollstonecraft) let her mingle in her compositions so much of the poison of the new-fangled systems of philosophy, that it requires no common powers of discrimination to select what is excellent from what is execrable (1800:Vol.1:371).

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<sup>21</sup> I presume this is a quotation from the writings of the seventeenth century French priest, Abbe St Pierre, who wrote on his travels and on world affairs.

Here, she is using her novel to make comments on the behaviour of women in society and is prepared to quote from and criticise other writers as she does so. It is, of course, part of her purpose in writing a novel to show Constantia's behaviour as a model for other women.

Wells cannot help making her readers aware of her attitude to black people.

Constantia is found a position looking after a Miss Carleton, from the West Indies, and asks why she "has been suffered to remain so long in the West Indies" where she could "run the risk of contamination from the negroes. The danger to females is consequently greatest." Ironically, Constantia discovers that Miss Carleton is the daughter of a slave mother and a white father. Wells reports that Constantia prayed to God to help her in looking after this young woman "who though of a different complexion was still of the same species." Her father had told her never to mix with mulattoes (1800:Vol.2:272). However, if the reference to "same species" should make the reader think Wells is too liberal, she makes another attack on Wollstonecraft in the person of a Miss Norcliffe who calls herself a Deist and a disciple of Wollstonecraft. At this point, instead of commenting as narrator, Wells makes Constantia criticise Miss Norcliffe directly for attacking Marie Antoinette. According to Constantia, Marie Antoinette was only seeking happiness and "what surprises me is that one of the Godwin school should consider the pursuit of happiness as reprehensible" (1800:Vol.2:362). She then tells Miss Norcliffe:

You know that one of our sentimental female writers thought as you do; perhaps her confinement in one of the prisons of Paris, for no crime but being a friend of the wife of the Ex-Minister Roland, may have caused her to alter her opinion, and made her wish to retain that respectable rank in society which she once held in her native country (1800: Vol.2: 362).

This must be a reference to Helen Maria Williams since Mary Wollstonecraft was never in prison in Paris. On the other hand, Williams remained in Paris and lived with a man she may not have been married to.

Wells is determined that her fictional heroine should take on the real life people of her day. Some time later in the novel, Constantia is in a coach on the way to visit her aunt in Chesterfield when she overhears a discussion about Joseph Priestley whom one traveller calls an incendiary and a traitor who should be exiled. Constantia gives

her more moderate view: “though I should not like his religious tenets to spread, nor do I conceive any man is warranted in propagating opinions that are subversive of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, I yet think the treatment he received at Birmingham, will ever be a indelible disgrace to the inhabitants and throw odium on the country at large” (1800:Vol.3:104). She admits she has never read any Priestley but this is not necessary in order to refute his doctrines. She then discovers one of the travellers is Mrs Priestley (1800:Vol.3:104). Wells, meanwhile, is ready to praise other well-known people as she describes Constantia meeting someone from Lichfield, “so celebrated for the luminaries which it has sent forth to enlighten and entertain mankind” (1800:Vol.3:130).<sup>22</sup> Just as Constantia is allowed by Wells to have liberal feelings towards black and mixed-race people, and towards freedom of the press, she is also given the chance to show her toleration for Jews. Mrs Hayman, a friend of her aunt’s, tells her life story in which she is indebted to the help of a Mr Alvarez, a merchant from Hamburg, who has previously been helped by her husband. Mrs Hayman says: “This proof of gratitude in a man professing a faith so different from mine, (the family of Alvarez being Jews from Portugal) affected me more than I can express” (1800:Vol.3:255). He helps her to escape from France and she then says: “My obligations to the family of Alvarez, have, I trust, extinguished in my bosom every spark of prejudice against any sect whatever” (1800:Vol.3:277). Wells reports that the fact that someone from a Christian holy order should have been saved by someone from a:

tribe whom so many lukewarm Christians affect to despise, and to consider unworthy of being admitted to a participation of the benefits which all faithful and loyal subjects have a right to expect from the government under which they live, gratified the feeling of Constantia in the highest degree (1800: Vol.3: 277).<sup>23</sup>

The rather lengthy insertion of Mrs Hayman’s story into the main narrative might be seen as heavy-handed in the structure of the novel, but it allows Wells to express opinions, in this case about Jews, for which she might find no other public outlet. She

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<sup>22</sup> No doubt Wells is thinking of Dr Johnson, Erasmus Darwin and possibly Anna Seward, a poet known as the Swan of Lichfield.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch also has a Jewish character in her novel, *Sherwood Forest* (1804). Julian, the Jew, is almost a Robin Hood character since Walter meets him in the forest and he helps Walter and his friend, Donald, out of financial difficulties. In return, Walter goes to London to work among persecuted Jews. Julian says he will be returning to Portugal “pleased that I have met two English gentlemen who do not think themselves degraded by their acquaintance with a Jew” (1804:Vol.3:184).



is offering more than friendship and sympathy. Constantia's acceptance of Mrs Hayman's views includes an implied demand for Jews to be admitted to full citizenship.

Almost at the end of the novel, Wells introduces an incident between Constantia and her aunt which allows Wells to make her views on books and reading available to the reader. Constantia's aunt watches her unpack her library which has been selected for her by her father and says "very pointedly that a bookworm was her aversion" (1800: Vol.3:343). She thinks women should not read too much or try to become too learned. "Her niece very mildly answered that she was exactly of the same opinion respecting the folly of women imagining themselves to be learned;" and for a minute the reader thinks Wells has given in to the criticisms of so many of the period about women's learning, but then she has Constantia add: "that she had heard her father say, that the few men entitled to be ranked as such, were generally the least disposed to assert their own superiority"(1800:Vol.3:343). I would argue here that Wells is saying it is likewise acceptable for women to be learned as long as they are not assertive about it. Certainly, there is no suggestion that Constantia should or will part from her library or stop reading. Wells presumably balances the dangers in her heroine's being a bookworm with her own homily on virtuous behaviour which is written directly to the reader (1800:Vol.3:358).

A more humorous but also more vitriolic attack on many of Mary Wollstonecraft's beliefs is to be found in Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Hamilton's whole approach is to satirise Wollstonecraft in the person of her heroine Bridgetina Botherim "who has read every book in the circulating library" and can talk according to her less educated mother about "cowsation" and "persebility" (1800:Vol.1:3). Bridgetina has to correct her mother, saying she has not read history, travels, sermons or matters of fact, but only novels and metaphysics. However, her reading includes philosophers like William Godwin, which enables her to have an appropriate quotation to comment on everyday incidents, and on issues like duty. One of Bridgetina's friends, Julia, has been brought up reading a wide selection of books, but prefers romances and novels so that "wild and ungoverned imagination reigned paramount in her breast" (1800:Vol.1:147), and although Julia's father has provided these books, he is doubtful about her reading especially as he says "are not

all the authors who have talents or genius known to be democrats in their hearts” (1800:Vol.1:170). Hamilton continues her attack on novelists with a particularly strong one on Jean Jacques Rousseau. Bridgetina asks her lover, Henry, “whether the sublime virtues of his Eloisa do not enrapture your soul” (1800:Vol.1:190). Henry does not agree, because Eloisa’s passions contradict her virtue, and others of the party support Henry by claiming that if Rousseau’s novel was meant to be a warning, “it has done little good” (1800:Vol.1:194). Another says Rousseau’s system of female education which has as its aim pleasing men could not lead women “very firmly in the paths of virtue” (1800:Vol.1:195). Henry then attacks Wollstonecraft as if she had obtained her ideas from Rousseau. “Pity,” he says of *The Rights of Women* (sic), “that the very sensible authoress has sometimes permitted her zeal to hurry into expressions which have raised a prejudice against the whole. To superficial readers it appears to be her intention to unsex women entirely” (1800: Vol.1:196).<sup>24</sup> It appears that neither Hamilton/the narrator nor Henry realises how far Wollstonecraft disagrees with Rousseau. It is worth comparing Hamilton’s assessment of the evils of reading Rousseau with those of Amelia Opie in her novel, *Adeline Mowbray* (1805).<sup>25</sup> Opie makes it plain that Adeline, who is based on Wollstonecraft, has been neglected by her mother and becomes a free-thinking woman not believing in marriage, precisely because she was brought up encouraged to read the philosophers and not allowed to read Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761). “Had she read it, the sacrifice which the guilty but penitent Julia makes to filial affection, and the respectable light in which the institution of marriage is held up to view” would have made Adeline give up her lover Glenmurray (based on Godwin) with whom she was prepared to live without being married (Opie:1805:Vol.1: 154-5).<sup>26</sup> It seems novelists interpret *La Nouvelle Heloise* in a variety of ways but they expect their readers to understand the reference.

Hamilton’s next line of attack is through Francois Le Vaillant’s *Travels in Africa* (1796) which Mr Glib, one of Bridgetina’s philosopher friends, produces to give an example of Hottentot society where everyone is equal and there is no government and coercion.<sup>27</sup> The narrator/Hamilton suggests the reader should here compare this with

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<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Henry had been reading Richard Polwhele’s *Unsex’d Females* (1798).

<sup>25</sup> I discuss Opie’s novel in more detail in chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> A more sympathetic representation of Godwin appears in Mary Hays’ *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1797) in the person of Mr Francis.

<sup>27</sup> Hottentot is the name used by Hamilton: this culture in southern Africa is now known as Khoikhoi.

William Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793) and then makes fun of Mr Glib for saying he is ready to become a Hottentot (1800:Vol.1:321-322). This is followed by further quotations on the part of Glib from *Political Justice* and from Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) on how unjust and corrupt present society is. Another philosopher friend, appropriately named, Mr Myope, reports that "Citizen Glib has bestowed the whole of his circulating library upon the society (for emigrating). The superfluous books, such as history, travels, natural philosophy and divinity are to be sold for the benefit of the fund. The novels and metaphysical essays are reserved for the instruction of the philosophers" (1800: Vol.2:42). Here Hamilton is grouping novels and metaphysical essays together as equally pernicious.

Hamilton's next attack is on Mary Hays when she has Bridgetina admit to having a wet-nurse who loved literature with a comment from *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796): "Imagination lent its aid, and an importunate sensibility, panting for good, good unalloyed, completed the seduction" (1800:Vol.2:85). Hamilton wishes to make her readers laugh at Bridgetina when Bridgetina says her mother received some snuff wrapped in the proofs of *Political Justice*: "I read and sneezed, and sneezed and read, till the germ of philosophy began to fructify my soul" (1800:Vol.2:88). Julia meanwhile, is reading *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761) to such an extent that she "became the dupe of her own romantic imagination" (1800: Vol.2:170) and Hamilton implies Bridgetina is doing the same thing, since she follows Henry to London, giving as her excuse a quotation again from *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) about happiness and pleasure being the only true end of human existence. "The light balloon of fancy" in her mind was filled with "airy fumes" so that "judgement and commonsense (like the adventurous brothers of aerostatic memory) suffered themselves to be carried along by its wild career" (1800:Vol.2:170). Julia, meanwhile, whose father wants her to marry a Mr Minden, sees him as a "hateful Solmes" being forced on her with the cruelty of the Harlowes (1800:Vol.2:365). Hamilton/the narrator tells the reader that Henry's landlady has used her pen to write little treatises on the education of women (1800:Vol.2:334) while Bridgetina in London, pursues Henry with further excerpts from *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) (1800:Vol.2:400). Hamilton continues to praise the landlady for her attitude including the setting up of an asylum for poor women who might otherwise fall into

prostitution. Hamilton then mocks Gothic novels as Bridgetina prepares for a meeting with Henry by learning some suitable phrases which Hamilton comments on:

Not for the benefit of novel-writers, we here generously present the fair manufacturers in this line with a set of phrases, which, if carefully mixed up with a handful of story, a pretty quantity of moonshine, an old house of any kind, so that it be in sufficient decay and well tenanted with bats and owls, and two or three ghosts, will make a couple of very neat volumes (1800:Vol.3:102).

The philosophers are mocked again when Bridgetina's mother asks who is this General Utility that her daughter is always talking about. The explanation comes back, "General Utility, my dear madam, is an ideal personage.....whom some people go a great way out of the road to find,.....while.....if they would look for him in the plain path of Christian duty they would never miss their aim" (1800:Vol.3:225).

The story ends with Julia, seduced by her lover, Vallaton, finishing her days in the asylum for prostitutes and asking Bridgetina to learn from her mistakes, and the narrator ends with a homily on human happiness (1800:Vol.3: 365). She seems to be prepared to mock gothic and over-sentimental novels together with works of philosophy and novels written by the new philosophers. Because her novel adopts the satiric mode all the time, she is able to make sure her readers understand her views are very different from those of Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and Mary Hays. It is clear from all the allusions that Hamilton expects her readers to understand and possibly to have read the works she cites. Again, although Hamilton's politics differ from Wollstonecraft's and Hays', the fact that she mocks them implies that she and they belong to a republic or community of novel writers.

## **6. The Representation of a Community of Novelists with References to Books and Writers**

Women novelists take for granted that their readers will understand their references to other writers, whether they are making points about writing and reading or simply as part of an assumed and shared culture. Alethea Lewis uses other novelists to help to describe the characters she is writing about. In *The Microcosm* (1800) when she wishes to describe her hero, Henry Seymour, she says he is like Grandison, just as she, the author, is like Richardson; then as an afterthought she adds that perhaps Seymour is more like Tom Jones "of our cousin Fielding." In order to describe the

less savoury character of Stephen Percival she compares him to Mr Blifil (1800:Vol.1:157). She sees herself, therefore, as a cousin in writerly terms of both Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. When she wants to show how important novel writing and novel reading are, she gives the reader an account of a Spencer family discussion of a local writer called Miss Symonds. One of the men in the group says he has only seen one page of Miss Symond's novel but that is enough for him. Lewis has her heroine say: " 'Your sapience is very great indeed to see the merit or demerit of an author from just the opening a page. I think you ought to be at the head of all English reviewers'" (1800:Vol.1:104). Mr Russel, a cousin of the Spencer family, gives his view that reviewers are too strict on young writers. He says if they were more lenient and more impartial they would be more use to the community. Since we know that Mr Russel is a helpful member of the admired side of the family (Tom Jones rather than Blifil) we recognise as readers that this is a viewpoint that belongs to Lewis as author. It is contrasted immediately by Lewis giving the reader the view of Mrs Willet, a free-thinker who says they, presumably the reviewers, or maybe she means the novels themselves, are not nearly so pernicious as the bible. The visiting bishop, and friend of the Spencers, sums it up for Lewis by welcoming the usefulness of giving instruction through novels, and he adds that Miss Symonds is a particularly good example because of the way she writes (1800:Vol.2:110). Readers are left in no doubt that they are supposed to substitute Lewis for Symonds.

Reading novels is usually an important occupation of women novelists' heroines. Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch, in her novel *Fancied Events* (1799),<sup>28</sup> is at pains to make sure the reader knows exactly what her heroine is reading. Wherever Ellen, the heroine, finds herself, reading is important for her and Gooch expects the reader to recognise the authors who Ellen mentions. Ellen is reading Rousseau's *Eloise* when she is kidnapped by her lover, Douglas (1799:Vol.1:91). The reader is no doubt expected to see Douglas as a sort of St. Preux.. When he takes her to Edinburgh, Ellen recounts how she goes to see a play called *The Orphan* which would very likely have echoed her own life. When she is saved from Douglas by Captain Boaden, he sends her novels to read such as Miss Lee's *The Tale of the Recess* (1785). This novel tells the story of two daughters of Mary Queen of Scots who spend part of their lives

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<sup>28</sup> I examine parts of this book in chapter 5 on safe and unsafe places, since Ellen the heroine finds herself in several of these in turn. I also refer to it later in this chapter in connection with circulating libraries.

hidden in a mansion, but then are freed to play a part in the history of Scotland. Naming this novel is Gooch's way of showing how women can make important contributions to society. Ellen is delighted as she sees Boaden as the embodiment of Essex in the novel. She also enjoys Mrs Bennett's *Ellen, the Countess of Castle Howell* (1794) the preface to which mentions Bennett's legal battles in running a theatre in Edinburgh. (Gooch:1799:Vol.1:122). Later when she is in prison she reads a tragedy called *The Gamester*, and this comforts her.<sup>29</sup> When she is on board ship for Portugal and the weather is stormy, she again is comforted by reading, this time Ossian and Addison. Gooch does not tell the stories of the books Ellen is reading but takes it for granted that readers know the works, since the contents are relevant to Ellen's own problems. Even when no particular book is mentioned many novelists use the book as icon, symbol and metaphor.

One novelist who uses the book in this way is Alethea Lewis in her novel, *Rhoda* (1816). Rhoda, an orphan brought up by a country parson, is taken by her wealthy relation, Mrs Strickland, to the Stricklands' fashionable town house in London. Rhoda is horrified by Mrs Strickland's attitude to books. Rhoda realises the books in Mrs Strickland's library are for the binding only. Mrs Strickland says it is not necessary to read whole books anyway: " 'a bon mot, or the shrug of the shoulders from a pretty woman is of a thousand times more value than the best criticism that ever was made.' Lewis has Rhoda reply: " 'But can there be any pleasure in turning over the leaves of a book without giving oneself time to understand its contents?' " (1816:Vol.1:289). It is worth giving Mrs Strickland's reply in full:

'Oh I am not talking of the pleasure of reading, my dear. That I apprehend is tasted by very few; and I am sure there is no time, if we live in the world, to read half the books that it is necessary to talk of; but thank heaven there is a royal road to everything now; and what with abstracts and extracts and compendiums and the beauties of this author, and the essence of that, we can talk as fluently on all literary subjects, with as little expenditure of time, and no expense of thought, as if we had put out our eyes, and deadened our complexion by hours of midnight study' (1816:Vol.1:289).

Perhaps Mrs Strickland's "royal road" to reading is through one of the ladies' magazines. Since Mrs Strickland is established by Lewis as the philistine in matters of reading, readers know they are to respond in the same way as Rhoda. Lewis sees

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<sup>29</sup> I examine how much books and music mean to her at Mrs Montgomery's lodgings in chapter 5.

Mrs Strickland as a woman of fashion who is not interested in women's education, somebody who is quite content to live within the limits set by a society that wants women to be there only to please men. Of course, there are plenty of men, too, in Mrs Strickland's social sphere, who would be just as happy talking about the latest books based on "abstracts and extracts". To take an example from another novelist, John Thorpe in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) makes it plain to Catherine Morland that he belongs to Mrs Strickland's kind of social grouping where it is not necessary to read the books. When Catherine recommends the *Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) to him, he replies: " 'No, if I read any it shall be Mrs Radcliff's; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*' " (1818: 1995:45). Catherine has to tell him that it was written by Mrs Radcliffe and all he can do is to make even more of a fool of himself with a reference to "that other stupid book" Burney's *Camilla*. He manages to make two unimportant references proving to the reader that he has probably heard it talked about but has never read it. Luckily for him, neither has Catherine. (1818:1995:45)<sup>30</sup>

Lewis is determined to keep books in mind when developing her heroine's character. When Mrs Strickland takes Rhoda to stay with friends in the country, Rhoda meets the Randolfs, an older couple whose views are similar to Rhoda's. Thus, when Lady Randolph is asked by young Lady Harriet if Rhoda has come out yet, Lewis has Lady Randolph use a metaphor based on books to describe her new young friend. " 'I believe she is not quite published in form,' replied Lady Randolph, 'but I dare recommend her to your ladyship's notice. She is well worthy of being read in manuscript and I hope will cure you of part of your ennui' " (1816:Vol.2:22). Lady Harriet is undoubtedly one of those who do not do much reading. Rhoda's learning is discussed again by Lord Randolph and Lord William who could be a possible suitor for Rhoda. Lord William says he likes Rhoda because she "has not been excoriated by the barbarous arts of education.....We trace not the governess, not the professor, the Royal Institution, nor the reader of lectures in Miss Strickland's conversation" (1816: Vol.2:55). Lord Randolph feigns surprise and asks Lord William if he has not recently been an "ardent adorer of that phenomenon of female literature, by whom our sex has been so astonished and humiliated." Lord William replies: " 'Oh, name her not! The most sickening of the whole female creation. Admire her! Yes, as we admire a comet

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<sup>30</sup> Catherine Morland and Rhoda Strickland have many interests and viewpoints in common.

– something to talk of, and to wonder at; whose malign influence we deprecate, and from whom we look for no good” (1816:Vol.2:55). I imagine they are talking about Mary Wollstonecraft, and there seems to be a mixed message in what Lewis is making them say. Lord Randolph, whom we are to respect, says Wollstonecraft has humiliated men, while Lord William who is not much to be admired himself in this novel, is very dismissive, so it is not entirely clear what Lewis wants the reader to think, especially as Lord Randolph only laughs at Lord William’s last remark. I would argue that Lewis wants Rhoda to turn out somewhere half way along the spectrum between her guardian, Mrs Strictland, and Wollstonecraft; perhaps nearer to Wollstonecraft in learning as long as she leads a more Christian life. Lewis seems to be echoing the contributor to *The Lady’s Magazine* who writes of women novelists being admired as writers, but not esteemed as women.<sup>31</sup>

Lewis has her heroine make a marriage where she can be esteemed but where she herself loses her self-esteem. It seems as if Lewis is caught in her own heroine’s dilemma, since Rhoda marries someone she does not love, but this is the will of her guardian. However, as a sop to Rhoda’s love of books, Lewis allows her to visit a bookshop so she can send a present of books to her old friend Frances. She meets Lord Randolph in this bookshop and he asks her “I hope you don’t mean to be blue?” (1816:Vol.2:152). His comment is curious, again making it sound as if Lewis is not sure about what Rhoda ought to be doing. However, Lord Randolph helps Rhoda choose the books for Frances, and although Frances does not approve of Rhoda’s marriage, she thanks Rhoda for the books because, since they have been chosen by Rhoda, they are a kind of representation of Rhoda herself (1816:Vol.2:189). Sadly, Lewis does not tell us what those books are. Bookshops continue to be important places for Rhoda, just as they are important places for Lewis in the structure of her plot since the next time Rhoda is in a bookshop, she sees both Ponsonby, her old lover, whom she dares not do more than acknowledge now, and then Lord William who re-enters her life with the object of seducing her in spite of her now being married (1816:Vol.4:154). Ponsonby has married her friend Frances, and Rhoda’s husband shoots himself as a follow-up to a bungled duel with Lord William. Lady Randolph’s prophesy about her being well worth reading in manuscript, turns out

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<sup>31</sup> I refer to this in the section on *The Lady’s Magazine* in chapter 2



ironically, because in a way, Rhoda's life is never published, (in the sense that she achieves a successful and happy marriage), although Lewis's novel is.

By comparison, the eponymous heroine of *Ethelinde* (1789) by Charlotte Smith, is a heroine for whom books and libraries play a significant and more successful role. In *Ethelinde's* teasing of Clarinthia, her supposed friend who affects to be writing a novel, readers can see how Smith is mocking some of the pretentiousness among her contemporaries. However, Smith uses books and libraries as symbols of *Ethelinde's* character, while the less likeable characters are the ones who have no time for books or reading. Early on in the novel, *Ethelinde* is discussing Davenant, a visitor to Grasmere Abbey where she is staying with her cousin Sir Edward Newenden. *Ethelinde* dismisses Davenant by saying: " 'He never takes up a book, or enters with any kind of interest into the most instructive conversation'" (1789:Vol.1:45). By contrast the man whom she falls in love with, Charles Montgomery, lives with his mother in a small cottage, where as his mother says: " 'As we equally understand several languages, our reading is pretty extensive; and books are almost our only indulgence'" (1789:Vol.1:164). *Ethelinde* is a little worried at falling in love with Montgomery: "To feel herself thus strongly and suddenly attached to a person of whom she knew so little, was exactly that romantic infatuation which she had so often condemned as weakness when it had occurred in real life, and as a dangerous example when represented in novels" (1789:Vol.1:210). Smith's conflation of life and novels here is like Lewis's description of Rhoda as the not yet published manuscript. Some time later, *Ethelinde's* reading is mocked by both Clarinthia and Sir Edward's wife, Lady Newenden, who is not at all interested in books, but of course Smith is satirising both Clarinthia and Lady Newenden. When Clarinthia asks Lady Newenden if she has read the latest novel, Lady Newenden replies that she "seldom reads those things." " 'Dear,' exclaimed the gentle Clarinthia, 'I thought everybody had read those sort of fashionable books.'" Not content with mocking Lady Newenden, Clarinthia now asks her if *Ethelinde* is a reader. " 'Oh, yes,' replied Lady Newenden with a contemptuous smile, 'Miss Chesterville reads, I fancy, every book that is to be had at a circulating library'" (1789:Vol.2: 111). Lady Newenden is particularly annoyed because she begins to realise that one of the characteristics that interests her husband in *Ethelinde* is her love of reading. Smith makes this clear when she has Sir Edward say to *Ethelinde*: " 'I want a companion, a friend, a rational being – and I

meet only a fine lady who sacrifices, to the opinion of the weak and vicious, her health , her time, her fortune, and the peace of her husband” (1789:Vol.2:123). Sir Edward’s sister, Ellen, is as uninterested in books as his wife; in fact her only interest is horses, so when Ethelinde is invited to stay with Ellen, she hesitates since “Ellen was not only incapable of friendship, but of tenderness and pity; and who had no idea either of books or of that sort of conversation in which Ethelinde delighted and excelled” (1789:Vol.4:48). For both Lewis and Smith, friendship and companionship in marriage depend on both parties sharing the activity of reading.

Like Lewis, Smith moves the structure of her novel forward by having her heroine meet important characters in a bookshop or library. Ethelinde goes to obtain the second volume of a book she is reading when she sees a stranger reading there, who looks familiar. An evening or two later, she goes out because “she had been disappointed of the second volume of the book she had begun, which was the beautiful and pathetic *Julia de Roubigne*, but she had taken another simple and natural story, *Fatal Obedience, or the History of Mr Freeland*;.....and was absorbed by her concern for the lovely unfortunate Gertrude,” when she meets the stranger again (1789:Vol.4:108-110). The stranger is her lover’s uncle, Mr Harcourt, and has money for him and his mother. When Ethelinde rebukes her brother, Henry, for gambling away the money Montgomery’s family has given him too, Henry tells her: ““I wish you could get this whining romantic nonsense, out of your head, about inviolable friendship, and everlasting love-stuff that you have picked up from the novels and story books you are eternally reading. In real life such things are not”” (1789:Vol.5:191). He warns her that Montgomery might come back from India where he has taken a posting, with “an Asiatic wife and half a dozen little yellow children” (1789:Vol.5:191). The way in which Smith links the deriding of novels with the less reliable and less likeable characters always means that the reader has to take what novels can offer more seriously, as Ethelinde does, not maybe the sort that Clarinthia writes, but the sort that Smith herself writes. Smith’s heroine has a more “publishable” ending compared with Lewis’s Rhoda, because Montgomery comes back and he marries Ethelinde, so Ethelinde’s trust in books is vindicated. In this novel Smith shows how unlikely it is for a marriage to be successful if only one of the partners has an interest in books. Ethelinde and Montgomery share this interest. As

for Lewis' heroine, Rhoda, she marries someone who has no interest in books, and the marriage is a failure.

The importance of the novel in the lives of characters within the novel is emphasised by Sarah Wilkinson in *The Mysterious Child* (1808).<sup>32</sup> Early in the novel, one of the characters called Mr Radnor refers to the situation of Berthalina, the heroine, who is facing a problem because her father's death has left her at the mercy of the incestuous advances of her brother.

‘With a few embellishments,’ remarked Mr Radnor, ‘the adventures of our young friend and favourite, my dearest Emma, might be swelled into a wondrous tale by some fair scribbler in this novel-writing and novel-reading age, and the lovely Berthalina shine with lustre as the heroine of the piece, after she has undergone a few more distresses, horror, disappointments, love and whole train of etceteras calculated for the composition’  
(1808:Chap.vii:n.pag.).

The irony is that Wilkinson does exactly what Mr Radnor suggests with such a “train of etceteras” that the reader becomes quite confused with the relationships between step-brothers and sisters. Finally, her brother is shown not to have been her real brother and her lover who she eventually marries is shown to be her step-brother, her step-mother's son by a former marriage, so they are not related. “This novel-writing and novel-reading age,” as Wilkinson's character, Mr Radnor calls it, is made possible by the circulating libraries, as I mention earlier in this chapter. Novel writers and novel readers were brought together through the circulating libraries. The libraries were the public interface where two private activities, writing and reading, were brought together in a public space. However, the circulating library remained a problematic space for women novelists because of the constant criticisms. Mary Robinson in *Walsingham* (1797) both decries and defends the circulating library; for one of Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch's heroines it becomes a lifeline when she is in prison.

## **7. The Representation of Circulating Libraries**

Without the circulating libraries women novelists would not have found their readers and since the tirade against them is largely based on the damage they could cause to young women, I would argue that it is a rearguard action by people frightened of a

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<sup>32</sup> I refer to this novel in chapter 3 on letter-writing.

new social phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> However, women novelists who may have depended on circulating libraries for the popularity of their novels were aware themselves of how they had become fashionable places frequented by people who had no real interest in literature. The eponymous hero of Mary Robinson's *Walsingham* (1797) gives a satirical account of the Bath circulating library. "The Library was crowded with unlettered triflers; and every new publication was demanded with an avidity which human politeness had scarcely time to obey, plays pamphlets, novels, magazines, and reviews were handed round and as quickly, with their leaves unopened, returned to the librarian" (1797:1805:Vol.III:207). Walsingham is reading a newspaper and has himself gone into the library while waiting for horses to take him to Bristol. While there he meets upper class acquaintances whose "unlettered" comments on books he then reports. The Duchess of Riversford says she hates the modern heroes in the "manufactured volumes produced by the grinding brains of illiterate matrons for the benefit of the rising generation." She asks instead for "a Werther, or a St.Preux, nay even a Lovelace or a Tom Jones" (1797:1805:Vol.III.208). For a moment it appears as if she might be offering a considered judgement against badly written, romantic novels, but on the contrary, it soon becomes clear that Robinson makes the Duchess complain of heroes who are "Lord Wou'd -be-good or Count Never-wrong." She says she read one of these novels from a "novel-mill" recently, which had been well reviewed but it was full of "tinder-boxes and potatoes" which appears to be her way of saying boring and moralistic (1797:1805:Vol.III:211). Since Walsingham is at pains to deride the Duchess, it might follow that Robinson is using Walsingham as her mouthpiece to defend such novels. Lady Arabella wonders "if there will be any books in another century. It would be monstrous comical if they should be totally exploded" (1797:1805:Vol.III:223). The Duchess's fear of boredom is reiterated by Lady Arabella who asks Walsingham to recommend a book "But do not desire me to choose any thing tedious, for I never read, but when my femme de chambre is putting my hair in papillots and that operation seldom lasts more than six minutes," and she adds that she only reads books if the title is pretty (1797:1805:Vol.III;223).

Robinson takes the discussion between the Duchess and Walsingham much further by making the Duchess defend the aristocracy of wealth, "men of titles", while

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<sup>33</sup> There are articles on the internet comparing the growth of circulating libraries in the early nineteenth century with the growth of video libraries at the end of the twentieth century.

Walsingham defends the aristocracy of genius, “men of letters” (1797:1805: Vol.III: 242), something she was to do again two years later in *The Natural Daughter* (1799).<sup>34</sup> The Duchess claims that newspapers are too cheap: “ ‘What right have the canaille to know the transactions of the upper world?’ ” she asks (1797:1805:Vol.III: 232), but of course, it is in a circulating library that what she calls the canaille can read what they want. “ ‘Heaven forbid,’ ” Walsingham tells her, “ ‘that the time should ever approach when that source of public information, which has so long been the pride of Englishmen, shall be closed and annihilated’ ” (1797:1805:Vol.III:233). By setting this discussion in a circulating library, Robinson has in effect endorsed the part played by those libraries in the debates going on the literary public sphere. They may be open to the corruption brought by those like the Duchess who would like to see the libraries restricted to the aristocracy, but Robinson/Walsingham know how important they are for novelists and the general public, particularly women.

The importance of the circulating library for a woman who is in trouble is highlighted in Elizabeth Sara Villa Real Gooch’s *Fancied Events* (1799). I mention this novel in the previous section of this chapter to illustrate the way Gooch names many of the novels and plays her heroine, Ellen, is reading. When Ellen is hounded out of one supposed safe place and finds herself in the Tolbooth for debt, the man who looks after the prisoners, Kinloch, stands security for Ellen to join a circulating library and it is the books she gets from the library which sustain her while she is in prison (1799: Vol.I:211). Gooch calls Ellen’s friends in the Tolbooth who support her and with whom she can share her books, “the Little Republic” (1799:Vol.1:226). Gooch knew what life in a debtor’s prison was like. She was arrested in Lille in France and spent time in the Fleet in London (1992:Vol.III.86). She does not mention being able to join a circulating library herself while in prison. However later when she leaves prison and meets a Mr Lindley who is sent by his regiment to Beith in Scotland, she travels with him and at first calls Beith a dismal place. But they find a circulating library “amply stocked with old magazines” which with a pianoforte and excursions to interesting places nearby, make them very happy (1992:Vol.III:95). This is a short period of happiness but it is worth noticing how the circulating library makes no small contribution to ameliorating her life and the life of one of her heroines.

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<sup>34</sup> I discuss this in chapter 2.

Gooch and Robinson, like all the other novelists I refer to in this chapter, are defenders of the novel: in their prefaces and interventions in the text of their novels; and in the many references they make to books, reading and libraries within the narration. They use the novel for satirising viewpoints they wish to criticise. In particular, Wollstonecraft is attacked frequently, partly for her views, but also for her life-style. It is as if those novelists who criticise other novelists such as Wollstonecraft and Hays, can only defend their own position as writers through these attacks. The novel therefore becomes a site for public debate about the novel, as well as about other issues concerned with education and marriage. Women novelists know it is their “province” where they can bring private and public issues together. Their heroines are not always so fortunate. Sometimes, women characters who write and read are mocked or refused the possibility of writing after marriage; or their marriages fail because they are forced into non-companionable marriages where reading cannot be shared. Their heroines are at risk not only in this metaphorical space, but often in the representation of real space, the houses and homes they live in. It is this aspect of women’s novels that I analyse in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5. Houses, Gardens, Estates: a Proper Place for Women

### 1. Introduction

I argue that the novel is a safe place for women authors, but that it is not always as safe for their heroines. In this chapter I explore the representation of houses, gardens and estates, as domestic sites, and therefore places where it is proper for women characters to be.<sup>1</sup> The house is the place where women might be expected to have some degree of control; it is also the place where novels are written and read. However, this proper place may not always be the place where they can exercise control or even have the freedom to write and read as they wish, especially when levels of propriety are determined by fathers, brothers and husbands. Thus the purpose of my analysis of the way in which houses and estates are represented in novels seeks to explore the link established by women novelists between the novel itself and the house within the novel. This exploration will be informed by Harvey's ideas where he points to Raymond Williams' novels as an example of fiction using standpoint and location "to create a critical space from which to challenge hegemonic discourses" (1996:102).<sup>2</sup> In section 2 of this chapter, I analyse Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Mary Hays' *A Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795) to explore the way standpoint and location, that is women's lived experience, in houses, gardens and estates are used in novels by women to expose the power or lack of power wielded by their women characters. Since women could not own property unless they were single or widowed, married women might often be in domestic situations where, rather than being mistress of a house or home, they would find themselves prisoners in their own homes. This could well be true of young, single women who might be at the mercy of parents and brothers, or even older sisters. These novels tell of houses changing overnight from a home to a prison, or of young women being incarcerated in frightening circumstances with no escape. Even the sentimental novel that avoids Gothic extremes might well have the heroine imprisoned for at least some of the time in unpleasant circumstances. Mary Hays has her heroine in *A Victim of Prejudice* (1799), Mary Raymond, use the same phrase,

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "proper" here in the sense pointed out by Mary Poovey in her book *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, "her desires bent gracefully to her master's will" (1984:3).

<sup>2</sup> I discuss Harvey's ideas in detail in chapter 1.

“the magic circle” used by Emma, her heroine in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), to describe the way women are encircled or kept within their limits in male society.<sup>3</sup>

In section 3 of this chapter, I analyse a particularly unpleasant form of this limitation where the heroine or another woman character is incarcerated in an asylum or madhouse, as they were more usually called, in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Charlotte Smith’s *The Young Philosopher* (1798) and Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* (1799). In each case, I question how far property and propriety are at stake for the men or women who are responsible for the incarceration. In section 4, I explore this issue of the woman character not complying with the wishes of parents who are concerned with property, and the brother who is concerned with proper behaviour as it is expounded in Charlotte Smith’s novel *Emmeline* (1788); I follow this in section 5, with an examination of Alethea Lewis’ *Disobedience* (1797) where, as the title implies, the heroine Mary refuses to marry the man chosen by her parents. One of her reasons for disobeying is so that she can marry a man of her choice, and live a useful life independent of the income of an unwanted husband’s inheritance. In section 6, I examine another novel by Lewis, *The Microcosm* (1800), where again the heroine has to escape from the house of an unwanted lover, and looks forward to a life where she can cultivate her estates as a useful member of society; and Helena Wells’ *The Stepmother* (1799) where Wells shows how for her heroine, good works are more important than gaining property through marriage. I discuss how far these authors show their women characters expressing their own desires and refusing to accept the decisions made for them by parents and husbands; to what degree they are more rebellious than Hannah More would have them in her *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), where she claims that for women “propriety is the centre in which all the lines of duty and agreeableness meet” (1799:1996:176), a defence of the “magic circle” which is anathema to Mary Hays’ characters, Emma in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796:1996:32); and to Mary Raymond in *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799:1996:122). Thus, this chapter

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<sup>3</sup> Young men might come under similar pressure from parents to marry someone they did not want to, but they were less likely to be taken away, kidnapped, and shut up. They might be sent away and have financial pressure put on them, but they were not usually incarcerated; for example, in Alethea Lewis’ *Disobedience* (1797) while Mary’s parents incarcerate her in a castle in Scotland, William’s father merely sends him away to another part of Wales.



examines the way that representation of domestic space in novels can be an attempt by women authors to demonstrate the constraints on women generally in society.

## 2. Women's Limits

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) mocks the Gothic scenario where the heroine is in a frightening environment, but at the same time Austen uses the scenario for the purposes of highlighting her heroine's vulnerability. After puncturing Catherine Morland's image of the Abbey as a Gothic castle with chests and cabinets full of scary manuscripts, and an owner who has murdered his wife, Austen reversesthe Gothic story, in a nevertheless Gothic fashion, by having General Tilney send Catherine away without explanation. There is still the traditional power of the father-figure to act in any way he wishes, victimising the heroine, and when the reason is revealed, it is because of his (mistaken) belief that Catherine Morland's family does not have enough money for her to be a worthwhile match for his son. The second half of the last sentence of the novel is telling (even though the "filial disobedience" refers to a son rather than a daughter): "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (1818:1995:219). Catherine's education, therefore, through reading the works of Ann Radcliffe is not entirely lost. As Edward Copeland points out, *Northanger Abbey* offers "a determinedly sunny corrective to the horrid fiction of the circulating library, yet, paradoxically, it shares the same economic assumptions with the objects of its derision" (1995:59). To rephrase Copeland's argument, which I refer to in chapter 1, I would argue that the gloomy light within castle and grotto parallels the difficult position of women within ordinary households. The resolution for Austen is to allow Catherine to connive with Henry's disobedience towards his father, so that she can marry Henry and become mistress of a safe and pleasant house, that is, the parsonage at Woodston. The pressures which the compelling needs of property and propriety impose on Henry and Catherine have only been solved by Austen through that disobedience and conniving.

In chapter 3, I examine Julia Wright's analysis of Eliza Fenwick's *Secrecy* (1795) to show how Wright sees the sites of power and lack of power within the letters themselves in this epistolary novel. Those sites are linked not only to the writing of

letters, but also to the places where the letter-writing takes place. Wright draws on Bourdieu to highlight the importance of place to all characters within the novel (Wright: 1998: 150).<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this takes on extra significance when a character is held in a place they might not otherwise want to be in. Sibilla writes to Caroline of how she feels imprisoned in the castle once Clement has been sent away but how it had appeared differently earlier on: “The castle then seemed no prison, the moat seemed no barrier. Sometimes my uncle carried Clement abroad to visit with him, but then I was sure of his return” (1795:1995:58). Caroline and Sibilla see the woods in the castle grounds very differently because Sibilla is confined and Caroline is not. Caroline is intrigued with the layout of the landscape but frightened once it becomes dark. She is surprised that Sibilla is not frightened of the darkness of the woods but Caroline is not yet aware of how, for Sibilla, the inside of the castle is just as bad (1795:1995:53-4). In fact, out of necessity, Sibilla learns to cope with the horrors of her confinement more heroically than her lover, Clement, can cope with his disappointments, or Filmar, her would-be seducer, with the very castle in which she has to stay. Filmar confesses to Sir Walter Boyer: “Miss Valmont, I dare say, feels no horror in listening to such sounds, nor tracing these murmuring galleries, lonely staircases etc. I should not exist six months in this castle” (1795:1995:228). In the end, however, Sibilla’s stoicism is not sufficient: her disobedient and secret marriage does not allow for a happy ending to this novel.

Mary Hays’ *A Victim of Prejudice* (1799) is an illustration of how Bourdieu’s suggestion that the groups or classes of the population with hegemony can impose an acceptance of their “sense of limits” on the rest of the population. Mary Raymond, the character in the novel who narrates her own story, is brought up in a pleasant house in “a romantic village in the county of Monmouthshire” by a guardian whom she regards as a father (1799:1996:5).<sup>5</sup> Mary Raymond is happy and relaxed in her house and garden and its surroundings until she is dared by William Pelham, an

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<sup>4</sup> “The sense of one’s place, as the sense of what one can or cannot allow oneself, implies a tacit acceptance of one’s position, a sense of limits (‘that’s not meant for us’) or –what amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances to be marked and maintained, respected, or expected of others” (Bourdieu:1993:231).

<sup>5</sup> Wales often seems to be a haven for English women under stress in London or other parts of England. This is true for Anna in Agnes Bennett’s novel of that name, and for another Mary in Alethea Lewis’ *Disobedience* (1797) which I examine in more detail later in this chapter.

aristocratic pupil taken in by Mr Raymond, to steal some grapes from the neighbour's garden. It could be argued that no-one is safe if they enter their neighbour's land to steal, but the important aspect of Hays' plot is that both William Pelham and the neighbour, Sir Peter Osbourne, take sexual advantage of Mary, in a way that Mary cannot escape. When Mary demurs at breaking her guardian's rules, William argues taunts her with not being his friend (1799:1996:12-13).

Mary, unable to resist these taunts, climbs over the fence and picks a bunch of grapes. She is caught in the act by Sir Peter Osbourne, who instead of simply scolding her or reporting her to her guardian, reacts by taking advantage of her vulnerable position: "By God!" said he, 'a little beauty! a Hebe! A wood-nymph! I must and will have a kiss; and, d-n me! you shall be welcome to all the grapes in the green-house'" (1799:1996:14). Mary manages to extricate herself from his clutches but the terror she experiences brings on an attack of scarlet fever. She recovers from the scarlet fever but the neighbourhood is never the same again. Some time later, she is out in the woods with William and she tries to save a hare from some men who are hunting it. The leader of the hunt is revealed to be Sir Peter Osbourne who attacks William with his whip. Mary leaps between them and receives the lashes in William's place (1799:1996:21). It is not just Sir Peter who has made the romantic village unsafe for Mary but also the fact that she and William are in love, and Mr Raymond has promised William's father that the boy will not be allowed to make any attachments unsuitable to his position as a future "man of the world." Mary is forced, or rather her desire to be obedient forces her, to leave the village, in order that William's inheritance shall not be jeopardised by marriage to someone without property.

Mary's next abode is near the sea with the family of a young curate, Mr Neville. Mary Raymond describes how the mornings were "devoted to business.....In the after-part of the day literature, music, the instruction of their children, a ramble among the neighbouring hamlets" (1799:1996:46). Mary joins in this "tranquillity" until one day, caught by the tide on the shore, she is saved by a passing boat, whose skipper happens to be Sir Peter Osbourne. Mary is saved from the sea, but not from Sir Peter who sets her on shore and then harasses her by constant visits to the Nevilles' house. Eventually, Mr Neville tells Sir Peter he is not welcome, but Sir Peter engineers his revenge: when the Neville living falls into his hands he tells Mr Neville he is now

giving it to someone else, and the Nevilles must leave their frugal, but what has been up till then, their secure living.

Mary comes to realise how the limits on her own sense of place are now jeopardising other people as well (1799:1996:89). She has, in the meantime, received information from Mr Raymond that her mother was someone whom he once loved, but who was seduced by another man, and after Mary's birth was involved with him in a murder for which she was hanged. Mr Raymond had promised her before she died to look after Mary. When Mary hears of the Nevilles' dilemma, she says: " 'It is to me, then,.....wretched child of misfortune! That you owe this calamity; me, who am fated to involve in my destiny all who know or love me!'" (1799:1996:89).

However, it is not Mary's fault that her own, and with it the Nevilles' place, has been limited in this way. Mary Hays makes this plain in her Advertisement to the Reader before the novel begins, where she recognises the need for chastity in woman, but asks for the same rules to be applied to man who has:

hitherto been solicitous at once to indulge his own voluptuousness and to counteract its baneful tendencies.....Let man revert to the source of these evils; let him be chaste himself, not seek to reconcile contradictions. – Can the streams run pure while the fountain is polluted? (1799: 1996:2).

Hays' argument is that if women are to behave with propriety, the same rules must apply to men.

Similarly, in the introduction to the novel which sets the scene for the course of events, and indeed highlights the limits of the place where the heroine seems doomed to finish her days, Mary Hays has Mary Raymond "immured in the gloomy walls of a prison" appealing to a possible reader who may also be "the victim of despotism, oppression, or error, tenant of a dungeon" (1799:1996:3). As Eleanor Ty points out in the notes to the 1996 edition of the novel, contemporary readers would be well aware of the resonances of these words, both with the settings of Gothic novels and with the events of the French Revolution (Ty:1996:18). In fact two years earlier, Alethea Lewis has a similar evocation in her novel *Disobedience* (1797), where her heroine, Mary, has been imprisoned by her parents in a castle in the north of England. Mary tries not to be frightened. "The days of enchanted castles, with dragons at the gates vomiting fire, were past. Her good sense despised such terrors, and she wondered at her own weakness, that could, for a moment, have yielded to them" (1797:Vol.3:91).

Her father, Sir James, says that if only they were in France there would be a dungeon for her, but Mary reminds her father that they are in England where *lettres de cachets* do not exist (1797:Vol.3:100).<sup>6</sup>

Mary Hays' Mary Raymond continues to experience difficulties with finding somewhere safe to live. When she returns to the romantic village, it is to find that Sir Peter has asked Mr Raymond for her hand in marriage, which she refuses because she is still in love with William Pelham. On Mr Raymond's death, she has, of course, to leave the house for financial reasons, and at the same time Sir Peter continues to force himself upon her. Before his death Mr Raymond suggested that she should go to London to some acquaintance of his. For him, "London is the centre to which talents and accomplishments naturally resort: in London, connections may be acquired, employment sought, observation avoided and liberty preserved" (1799:1996:102). Mary Hays knows only too well, which her character Mary Raymond does not, that that is a very male view. Mary Raymond has just claimed: "I can exert my talents for my support, or procure a sustenance by the labour of my hands" (1799:1996:99). In fact, as Eleanor Ty points out, Mary Hays had already referred to women's restrictions as a magic circle in her novel *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), some aspects of which I examine in chapter 3 on the use of letters. Emma, in similar circumstances to Mary Raymond's, exclaims: "Why are we bound, by the habits of society as with an adamant chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell?" (1796:1996:32). Mary Raymond is only just about to discover how limiting and violent that magic circle is when she arrives in London. Her guardian's predictions and her hopes for the preservation of her liberty are not confirmed.

On the journey to London she is tricked by a female accomplice of Sir Peter Osbourne's into divulging her details and is decoyed into his house where he keeps her in a locked room.<sup>7</sup> This locked room is both a literal place and a metaphor for where she has been and will be for the rest of her life. The key is on the outside and she is inside Sir Peter's "magic circle." In an attempt to escape during a night of

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<sup>6</sup> I examine *Disobedience* (1797) in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> The twentieth century male writer, Roald Dahl, has used this theme in one of his horror stories, not presumably to highlight the position of women in society, but to offer thrills to both male and female readers.

revelry by Sir Peter and his friends, she takes refuge in a room which is in fact Sir Peter's, and he then rapes her. The key gives him entry to her body, too. He releases her and she is found wandering in the streets by her old lover, William Pelham. He takes her to a nearby hotel and, for a little while, she finds comfort: "I felt guarded as by a talisman, encompassed in a magic circle, through which neither danger could assail nor sorrow pierce me" (1799:1996:122). At first this seems like a different kind of magic circle from the one referred to by Emma in Mary Hays' *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796): a protective one, not a restrictive one. But once William reveals that he has been forced by his father into marriage to another woman, the reader realises that it is the same magic circle: wherever women are, they are circled by men who can change so quickly from protectors to betrayers. The male role is two-sided, the one implies the possibility of the other.

Mary Raymond tries hard to become independent in London but is always trapped, not only by lack of money and lack of references, but also by the continued reports of her bad behaviour released by Sir Peter in an attempt to persuade her to accept him as her only way of salvation. When she is arrested for debt, he offers to pay her gaolers, which she refuses and she is only saved by the appearance of James, an old servant of Mr Raymond's. For a time it seems as if she might again find a safe place to live on James' newly rented farm, but since Sir Peter is the landlord, even that farm remains inside the circle which Sir Peter controls. After James' death, she is once more imprisoned, this time for debt. She decides to write the story of her life and it is only by writing that she is able to escape from the "magic circle"; or rather, her book escapes the sphere of male control; she herself, as her health declines, can only welcome "the tomb. Welcome, thrice welcome, quiet asylum! Whither my wishes hourly tend; where passion no longer racks the heart; where darkness shrouds, where slander and persecution pause and leave their victim; where disappointment and sorrow never enter!" (1799:1996:169). Hays is more realistic about the difficulties of women than Austen, but then her heroines, Emma and Mary, are represented as wishing to be more independent than Austen's heroine, Catherine.

### **3. Incarceration in an Asylum or Madhouse**

Mary Hays' magic circle keeps Emma Courtney and Mary Raymond within its power. Perhaps an even worse fate is that visited upon women who are imprisoned because

they are judged to be mad, usually at the whim of a suspicious or disgruntled husband. For these characters, the very un-English *lettre de cachet* becomes a reality. I analyse first Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). The subtitle itself reveals what Wollstonecraft's purpose is and as she writes in her preface: "The Wrongs of Woman, like the wrongs of the oppressed part of mankind, may be deemed necessary by their oppressors" but she goes on to dare anyone to claim what she writes is the result of "a distempered fancy, or the strong delineations of a wounded heart" (1798:1992:59). She is more interested, she says, in the wrongs of "woman" than of "an individual," and in a letter, presumably added to the preface by Godwin, she defines those wrongs as "matrimonial despotism of heart and conduct" (1798:1992:59).

Wollstonecraft is determined to make clear to the reader that this novel is not a Gothic horror of "castles filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul" (1798:1992:61). Gradually, Wollstonecraft unfolds what has happened to Maria. Her baby has been taken from her and she has been imprisoned by "the selfish schemes of her tyrant – her husband" (1798:1992:62). She looks through the window at "the desolate garden, and of part of a huge pile of buildings, that, after having been suffered, for half a century, to fall to decay, had undergone some clumsy repairs" (1798:1992:63). In thinking about her situation, she can only decide: "Was not the world a vast prison, and woman born slaves?" (1798:1992:64). This echoes the opening lines of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762) that men are born free but everywhere found in chains (1762:1948:240): whatever the state of the world, women, in Wollstonecraft's eyes, are not even born free. Maria's first hope of solace comes from her attendant, Jemima, who although of a lower class and less educated, nevertheless has suffered enough herself to want to try and alleviate Maria's suffering. Jemima brings Maria books and writing materials (1798:1992:65). Maria, like Mary in Wollstonecraft's first novel, *Mary* (1788) has "thinking powers" (1798:1992:3).<sup>8</sup> The books belong to a fellow inmate, Darnford, and through his marginal notes and messages, the place where Maria is incarcerated becomes less threatening. However, to some extent, Darnford too belongs to the patriarchal group that can encircle women, and if not

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to Wollstonecraft's character, Mary, who has "thinking powers" in chapter 1. I also refer to Wollstonecraft's use of first person narrative/memoir in chapter 3.

acting out the tyrant, like Venables, Maria's husband, he nevertheless acts out the possibility of romantic love, which can be just as tyrannical for a thinking woman, according to Claudia Johnson (Johnson: 2000:203). In fact, it is Jemima who enables Maria to escape from her confinement, and when her defence of Darnford in court fails, there is only the friendship of Jemima, another woman, left for her.

Wollstonecraft did not complete the novel, but in one of the fragments appended, Maria's daughter is still alive, and it is Jemima who brings the child to her mother, having taught her to say the word, "Mamma." At that point, Maria finds the will to live (1798:1992:148). This family unit will have two mothers and a daughter: the way for woman to stay out of the madhouse or asylum is to reject the insanity of marriage, whether to a tyrant or romantic hero. Female friendship is safer for the woman with "thinking powers" (1788:1992:3).<sup>9</sup>

The difficulties encountered by women are often not recognised by men, whether characters within the novels or by reviewers. Wollstonecraft has engineered the summing up by the judge at the end of Darnford's trial for adultery to show how he has failed to understand the political points made by Maria in her own and Darnford's defence. Her reference to her husband's "traps to ensnare me" is lost on the judge who sees only someone who is endangering marriage by seeking divorce. He admits that perhaps some individuals, but very few, might have to suffer in order "to maintain the sanctity of marriage" (1798:1992:144-5). As for Wollstonecraft's critics, Claudia Johnson refers to *The Anti-Jacobin Review's* hostile article which claims that Maria's situation is her own fault for allowing herself to be taken in by Venables. Equally, George Dyson, a friend of Wollstonecraft fails to understand her purposes, and Claudia Johnson refers to a letter from Wollstonecraft to Dyson in which she writes that she can only explain his not being moved by Maria's situation by the fact that he is a man (Johnson:2002:202). It is similar to Hazlitt's comment on Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814) where he fails to appreciate her heroine's "*female difficulties*", as Burney subtitles her novel.<sup>10</sup> I would argue that Wollstonecraft is attempting to move one stage beyond the "victim feminism" of regular Gothic novels, which Diane Long Hoeveler calls "an ideology of female power through pretended

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<sup>9</sup> I have here followed Claudia Johnson's offering of a possible interpretation, although Johnson also refers to Mary Poovey's interpretation that Wollstonecraft had written a typically romantic novel by allowing Maria to become involved with Darnford (Poovey:1984).

<sup>10</sup> I examine this in more detail in the next chapter.



and staged weakness” (Hoeveler:1998:7). Hoeveler argues that “when the female gothic heroine finally creates her own self-serving ideology of the companionable family, she is able to reject those juridically created systems, the home as prison or asylum that have ensnared her throughout the novel” (1998:21). If the fragment of notes, where Maria and Jemima bring up Maria’s daughter, is regarded as what Wollstonecraft wants for the ending of her novel, then this will be a very different “companionable family”. Maria will not have done what Gothic heroines do: run in a “large circle”, which according to Hoeveler, leads them back to the patriarchal home, although it will be “magically transformed into a maternally marked abode” (Hoeveler:1998:9-10), but this time marked in a slightly different way, by there being two mothers.

Wollstonecraft is not the only woman novelist to make use of the asylum as a way of highlighting women’s position in society. I refer to Mary Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* (1799)<sup>11</sup> where Martha is taken to an asylum, not as herself, but because she tries to save Sophia for whom she is working as a companion, by pretending to be Sophia; it is Sophia’s stepmother who has arranged for Sophia to be incarcerated. Apart from highlighting the way that women novelists are regarded, Robinson is equally concerned with the fate of women who do not fit into the rules worked out by society. Martha’s sister, Julia, has earlier told her she should obey her husband. Martha replies: “ ‘Then women, from the moment that they marry, do not submit to personal captivity only?’ said Martha. ‘Marriage, in that case, is little better than slavery. I detest the thought of enforced subordination’ ” (1799:Vol.1: 109). When Martha eventually escapes from the asylum after a fire, she discovers the woman she is with, is her mother, incarcerated by Julia. However, her sister’s unacceptable behaviour is not a straightforward series of unpleasant acts based on her own decisions: she is seen to have been manipulated by the men in her life and is herself imprisoned, on one occasion, by her husband (1799:Vol.2:229). Because of the way Julia has been brought up with much less education than her sister Martha, she falls prey to the machinations of patriarchal society. Unlike Martha, but like Martha’s husband, Mr Morley, she does not understand that “the ingenuous and liberal mind intuitively resists oppression; nor that the husband who would wisely govern, must

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<sup>11</sup> In chapter 2

hold the rein with a yielding, gentle hand, or he will find the effort both painful and destructive” (1799:Vol.2:161). Robinson’s suggestion is that the husband must be prepared to yield. However, Julia is an example of the oppressed group who accept the oppressor’s violence, symbolic or literal, as natural.

Robinson makes even wider claims bringing the public and personal together by making Martha a friend of the Duchess of Chatsworth, a very thinly disguised reference to the Duchess of Devonshire.<sup>12</sup> Robinson’s project here is to signal a woman who can defy at least some of society’s codes which put women in difficult situations: although Martha has the reputation of a woman who has left her husband, the Duchess makes sure she is accepted in Buxton society (1799:Vol.2:213).

Robinson, once again, mixes fact with fiction and involves her fictional characters with real ones, this time without disguise. Julia has an affair in Paris with Robespierre and orders the arrest of Martha and her husband who is ill and with whom she is partly reconciled, as they travel through Paris on their way to Italy. When Robespierre falls from power, Martha tries to save Julia but she has already poisoned herself (1799:Vol.2:270). Martha discovers that it is her own estranged husband who has dealt Julia the worst blows in her life. Julia has not escaped from the manipulations of male society, but when Martha’s husband falls over a precipice and is killed, there is some suggestion that Martha’s future will be slightly more independent. However, she comes back round the circle, to use Hoeveler’s phrase (1998:9-10), to a patriarchal home once more, albeit one where her new husband may “hold the rein with a yielding, gentle hand” (1799:Vol.2:284).

The asylum or madhouse, as a representation of both domestic and political aspects of society, is employed by Charlotte Smith in *The Young Philosopher* (1798: 1999).<sup>13</sup> When Mrs Glenmorris becomes so frenzied at the disappearance of her daughter, Medora, that she eventually falls into a state close to madness, it is easy for the doctor to suggest she is removed to “one of the most remote houses, within twenty miles of

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<sup>12</sup> It is clear, not only from her name, but also from her behaviour.

<sup>13</sup> I refer in chapter 4 to Smith’s preface to this book where she denies having been influenced by Wollstonecraft. Her denial of copying Wollstonecraft also gives her the chance to imply that her purposes are similar since she would “not blush to borrow” from her (1798:1999:5).

London, where lunatics are received” (1798:1999:Vol.III:225). Ironically, it is Mrs Glenmorris’ own mother, Lady Mary de Verdon, from whom she has been estranged for many years, who brings about her incarceration: for social and political reasons. Lady de Verdon, wishes the family inheritance not to pass to Medora but to her other granddaughter, Miss Cardonnel; not only because she thinks her daughter has behaved badly but also because she does not approve of the politics of her husband and friends. Mr Glenmorris “had been much talked of as a political writer of republican principles” and was friendly with a Mr Armitage of similar political tendencies (1798: 1999:Vol.III:212). She is persuaded by her friend and supporter, Mrs Grinstead, whose unsupportive attitude has been partly responsible for Mrs Glenmorris’ frame of mind, that any relaxation in her attitude to Mrs Glenmorris would be seen to “give encouragement to the too much relaxed morality of modern innovators” (1798:1999: Vol.III: 213). Because her daughter has defied her, though many years ago, Lady de Verdon can now convince herself that disposing of her in this way is “to acquit herself of her maternal duties in a manner even exemplary” (1798:1999:Vol.III:213). It is as if Mrs Glenmorris is fighting to escape from the limiting effects of patriarchal society, but Lady de Verdon is prepared to use its techniques herself in order to influence her granddaughters’ lives and decide which one of them she thinks behaves with more propriety and therefore has more right to inherit her property.

When Armitage visits Mrs Crewkherne, an aunt of Delmont, Medora’s lover, and acquaintance of the Glenmorris family, to ask why she has spread unpleasant rumours about them, Mrs Crewkherne claims that “it was not very likely any person who was very nice about their reputation would put themselves into the care of a person of your character.” She goes on to justify herself: “I am assured that you are an atheist, a deist, a freethinker, an illuminy; I don’t know what, not I; a Jacobin and a republican” (1798:1999:Vol.IV:246). Armitage is able both to mock her for saying that he is an atheist and a deist at the same time, and also to defend his right to being a freethinker because he wishes to think about “the happiness or misery of my species” (1798:199: Vol.IV:247). If he is a democrat, he nevertheless supports his king, and he is certainly not the kind of Jacobin that thinks the cruelty of the French revolutionaries is to be defended (1798: 1999:Vol.IV: 247). In this way, Smith, like Wollstonecraft, attacks a system where thinking women are liable to lose their reputations and their daughters, and the men who support them receive equal opprobrium. If Maria, in

Wollstonecraft's novel (1798), survives incarceration with the help of books, such as *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), Mrs Glenmorris tries other resources available to thinking women: botany and astronomy, though she finds it impossible to return to these studies seriously, because they remind her of time spent with Medora (1798:1999:Vol.IV:272). At this point in the novel, Smith is emphasising the qualities which she has already indicated make Mrs Glenmorris a woman of independent thought. Near the beginning of the novel, Smith makes clear how Mrs Glenmorris describes the difficulties she faced with her mother who called her "romantic" for daring to have an opinion of her own. Mrs Glenmorris tells Delmont, "if a woman, because she is a woman must resign all pretensions to being a *reasoning* being, and dares neither look to the right nor to the left, oh, may my Medora still be the child of nature and simplicity, still venture to express all she feels, even at the risk of being called a strange, romantic girl" (1798:1999:Vol.II:87). Medora, indeed, has learned what kind of a woman her mother wants her to be: when she tells Delmont of her trials during the period when she was lured away from her mother, she explains to him how her mother had always told her that firmness did not give "an unpleasant and unfeminine character to a woman; on the contrary, the mind that has acquired a certain degree of reliance on itself.....is alone capable of true gentleness and calmness.....and women who assume affected softness or languid apathy are never beloved" (1798:1999:Vol.IV: 307). Smith allows the daughter more of these qualities than the mother.

Smith ends the novel with a reunion between Mrs Glenmorris and Medora; Mrs Glenmorris is also reunited with her supportive husband and Medora marries Delmont, but like Alethea Lewis, in *Disobedience* (1797)<sup>14</sup>, the solution Smith offers to her characters' problems posed by society in Britain, is emigration to America. The Glenmorrises and Delmont are happy to give up any more thoughts of the de Verdon inheritance and live a simpler life without riches. Smith reports Mr Glenmorris' thoughts:

To cultivate the earth of another continent, to carry the arts of civil life, without its misery and its vices, to the wild regions of the globe, had in it a degree of sublimity, which, in Glenmorris's opinion, sunk the petty politics and false views so eagerly pursued in Europe, into something more despicable than childish imbecility, in proportion as such schemes are

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<sup>14</sup> I analyse *Disobedience* (1797) in section 5 below.

injurious to the general happiness of the society where they're exercised  
(1798: 1999:Vol.IV: 299).

Armitage wants to stay to work for that general happiness in England but although Glenmorris allows Armitage may have some justification for hope, he, Glenmorris, sees "the miseries inflicted by the social compact greatly exceed the happiness derived from it" and asks how he can live in such a country (1798:1999:Vol.IV:352). There is no place in the English society of the 1790s for a woman of Mrs Glenmorris' intelligence to live in the way she wants, even though she has been released from the asylum. She has to convince her son-in-law of the advantages of life in America. A similar move from incarceration to emigration occurs in Alethea Lewis' novel, *Disobedience* (1797). Before I examine how Lewis treats this subject I explore an earlier Smith novel, *Emmeline* (1788) where the heroine moves from house to house in order to comply with her family's desire for property; and another female character, Adeline, has to hide or is removed from society by her brother in order to comply with the ideals of propriety.

#### **4. Property and Propriety in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788)**

The eponymous heroine of *Emmeline* (1788) cannot find a safe abode and is continually at risk throughout the narrative. Emmeline is kidnapped and is often not free. Emmeline is an orphan, since, on the death of her mother and later her father, her uncle sends her to be brought up by the housekeeper, Mrs Carey and the steward of his castle in Pembrokeshire. The castle is half ruined and Emmeline and Mrs Carey live in one small section. She is not scared by the "dismantled windows, and broken floor of the library" and manages to examine the books "some of which lay tumbled in heaps on the floor, others promiscuously placed on the shelves, where the swallow, the sparrow and the daw had found habitations for many years" (1788:1988:7). Emmeline also spends her time "delighted to wander among the rocks that formed the bold and magnificent boundary of the ocean, which spread its immense expanse of water within half a mile of the castle," and "she often rambled several miles into the country, visiting the remote huts of the shepherds among the wildest mountains." (1788:1988:8). It seems as if the books, ruins and scenery play an equal part in Emmeline's self-education. The death of Mrs Carey leaves Emmeline with a problem which her absent uncle, Lord Montreville, solves by sending down a new

housekeeper, Mrs Garnet, who is not as motherly as Mrs Carey. Emmeline, therefore, moves out of the room she has shared with Mrs Carey into a little room in a turret which is a place of safety, both against Mrs Garnet and the steward, Maloney, who has designs on Emmeline. The turret room is also a safe haven from the influx of French and other servants who accompany Lord Montreville when he comes to visit with his son Delamere. Delamere also brings his friend, Fitz Edward, who appears as an unreliable rake. The castle has become unsafe for Emmeline, especially as Montreville gives Maloney permission to marry Emmeline and she feels even more threatened when Delamere falls in love with her. Emmeline, having met Delamere while out walking and heard of Maloney's intentions, from Montreville, keeps to her turret room, while hoping that Montreville will allow her to go and stay with Mrs Carey's sister in Swansea. But before she can be conveyed to Swansea, Delamere breaks down the door to her turret room. She manages to escape because she knows the castle passages and corridors while Delamere does not (1788:1988:38). She finds Lord Montreville who arranges for her to leave the castle, since he is looking for a better marriage for Delamere than Emmeline would provide.

Emmeline finds leaving the castle difficult (1788:1988:42). She cannot be consoled by the beautiful countryside she passes through, which her companion, Headly, one of Fitz Edward's servants, admires. However, "the very little, but neat habitation" (1788:1988:44), consisting of a parlour and a bedchamber, at Mrs Carey's sisters, proves a welcome retreat for Emmeline, especially when Lord Montreville sends her some books and drawing materials. Added to this, she meets a Mrs Stafford who is equally interested in reading and drawing and since she is older, can instruct Emmeline (1788:1988:50). Followed to Swansea by Delamere and Fitz Edward, and then by Lord Montreville, she then accepts the latter's offer of finding another home as a governess in Mrs Ashwood's family near London. Thus, Smith makes clear that even the neat habitation in Swansea can no longer provide her heroine with a safe home. However, Mrs Ashwood's also becomes a difficult abode for Emmeline when Delamere eventually finds her there. She feels sorry for him but she has promised Lord Montreville she will not associate with Delamere (1788:1988:105). Smith has contrived the narrative, so that it is the father's will over the son's that causes the heroine her continued distress. Lady Montreville is willing to incarcerate Emmeline. " 'If this little wretch,' said she, 'was in France, it would not be difficult to put an end

to the trouble she has dared to give us. A *lettre de cachet* would cure the creature of her presumption, and place her where her art and affectation should not disturb the peace of families of high rank” (1788:1988:139). She advises her husband to tell Emmeline she must marry the rich banker who is interested in her, or Lord Montreville will stop subsidising her. She insists Emmeline is to come and see her. When she arrives, Emmeline is overpowered by her surroundings in the ante-room “which was superbly furnished and covered with glasses, in which Emmeline had leisure to contemplate her pale and affrighted countenance” (178:1988:144). Lady Montreville accuses her of obtaining her methods for seducing her son from novels and from being “bred on the Welch mountains” (1788:1988:146). Smith has made Lady Montreville accuse Emmeline of impropriety in the interests of property, but Lady Montreville’s “cruelty and unfeminine insults” only serve to restore to Emmeline “some portion of that proper spirit and presence of mind which had been frightened from her” (1788:1988:147). Smith gives her heroine a different kind of propriety, one that suits a woman who thinks for herself. Emmeline leaves Lady Montreville’s having refused to submit, but later that evening, she is more or less kidnapped by Delamere. Her “proper spirit” has proved inadequate. Delamere takes her up the Great North Road, heading for Scotland but has to stop when she becomes ill and eventually Delamere promises to take her to Mrs Stafford’s, provided she agrees to see him there. She reminds him that “I have already been driven from Mowbray Castle, from Swansea, and from Mrs Ashwood’s, wholly on your account” and his reply is: “Your remedy, my Emmeline, is to consent to inhabit a house of your own and suffer me to be the first of your servants” (1788: 1988:179). Emmeline has given him a list of the places that he has made unsafe for her, and she is not willing to accept the supposedly safe place which becoming his wife would guarantee her. On the way to Mrs Stafford’s, they stop in Staines, where Emmeline persuades Delamere to bring her some novels. She takes up the second volume of *The Sorrows of Werther* (1774). It is clear that they have both already read it and they discuss the similarity of their own relationship to that of Werther and his lover, Charlotte. Delamere taunts her with the possibility that she will find an “Albert” at the Staffords’ house (1788:1988:184). When they reach Mrs Stafford’s house, Emmeline, determined to behave with propriety towards Lord Montreville, writes to tell him what has happened (1788:1988:195).

The continued pressure of their son's love for Emmeline works differently on the mother and father. Lady Montreville would like to send Emmeline to France to remove her from Delamere's influence, saying worse acts of violence have been committed to save the name of an aristocratic family. Lord Montreville tells her not to forget that she is a woman – "a woman too, whose birth should at least give you a liberal mind, and put you above thinking of an action as unfeminine as inhuman" (1788:1988:197). Here, Smith makes the father more liberal than the mother. Meanwhile, the Stafford's house, Woodford, becomes a place where Emmeline can relax again, even though Delamere has taken up lodgings nearby. While she is at Woodford, Mrs Stafford and Emmeline befriend a married woman, Adelina Trelawney, who has had an affair and is pregnant. The lover is revealed as Fitz Edward, friend of Delamere and brother-in law to her sister in Ireland. Here is another woman who is forced into hiding in a cottage in the woods, because society will not accept what she has done, although her husband is a rake and has as good as abandoned her. Emmeline secretly takes Adelina to Bath for the birth of her baby, until Adelina's younger brother, Godolphin, agrees to give her and the baby refuge at his house in the Isle of Wight, claiming publicly that the child is his. In order to protect the inheritance of property through the male line, society is willing to accept that a married man might have a son by a woman to whom he is not married, but cannot accept a married woman having a son by another man. For a time Emmeline is happy at Woodford, but loses this haven when Mrs Stafford has to go to France to help her husband escape the debts he has incurred in England. Emmeline agrees to go with her. They travel via the Isle of Wight and deliver Adelina's child to her brother. Godolphin's house is described as a place which reminds Emmeline of Mowbray Castle in Wales and becomes a symbol for Emmeline's falling in love with Godolphin. She walks from where they land on the island to the house: "Her walk lay along the high rocks that bounded the coast; and it was almost dark before she entered a small lawn surrounded with a plantation, in which the house of Godolphin was situated. About half an acre of ground lay between it and the cliff, which was beat by the swelling waves of the channel" (1788:1988:322). Before she and Mrs Stafford can leave for France a storm brews and she goes out of the house where:

everything in it bore testimony to the taste and temper of its master. The garden charmed her still more; surrounded by copse wood and evergreens, which seemed equally adapted to use and pleasure.....By reminding her of her early pleasures at Mowbray Castle, it brought back a thousand half-



obliterated and agreeable, tho' melancholy images to her mind; while its grandeur gratified her taste for the sublime (1788:1988:331).

Godolphin's house and Mowbray Castle will eventually become safe houses for Emmeline but the storm signifies that she has much to suffer first. She is concerned that the storm at sea which excites her with its magnificence will cause shipwreck and consequent grief to other people, a parallel to her own present griefs. Emmeline with no place of her own crosses to France to stay with the Staffords in Normandy. Her reaction to the French countryside is similar. The valley of the Seine attracts her but she is concerned at the poverty of the people, which is more stark than in England and "alarmed and disgusted" by the familiarity of the village women (1788:1988:356). Smith is here criticising the Ancien Regime in France for its depraving effects on women.

When the Staffords have to move to St Germans, she is saved by the Westhavens, Lady Augusta Westhaven being her cousin and Delamere's sister, while her husband, Lord Westhaven, is the elder brother of Godolphin. They go south to the Pays de Vaud to stay in the Chateau of St Alpin (1788:1988:377). Here is another reminder of castles and scenery from her childhood and she enjoys it but is harassed by the Chevalier de Bellozane, a Westhaven cousin. However, it is here in France that she receives, via Mrs Stafford, some caskets, which have been in her possession since she left Mowbray Castle, but which she has never managed to find time to examine. She now reads the documents inside and finds, contrary to what she has been told by her uncle, Lord Montreville, that her father was married to her mother, and therefore Mowbray Castle is by rights hers, as well as the income that her uncle has taken from her over the years. This makes Lord Montreville feel that perhaps Delamere should marry Emmeline after all, but she tells everyone that she is going to Mowbray Castle and will not marry at all (1788:1988:426). Eventually, after Delamere has been killed in a duel with Bellozane in defence of his elder sister, not his cousin, Emmeline marries Godolphin, and, having allowed Mrs Stafford refuge in Mowbray Castle, takes up residence herself (1788:1988:552-3). Poor Adelina is persuaded to give up Fitz Edward, even though Trelawney is dead and she could be free to marry, but she feels her disgrace too sorely. Emmeline approves of this decision. Smith will not offend the contemporary view of the fallen woman: once fallen, irretrievable. The best

she has to live for is a safe but sad existence with the Godolphins, seeing her son continue to call his uncle, father. The wayward elder sister of Delamere is confined in a convent in France by a *lettre de cachet* obtained by Lord Westhaven, her brother-in-law. Smith acknowledges that as a woman, it is unfair to suffer lack of a safe place to live if the woman obeys society's laws, but if she breaks the patriarchal rules, then her brother's house or a convent is all she can expect. A woman's infidelity threatens men's property rights. Smith claims some independence of spirit as proper for Emmeline but has sacrificed Adelina as a pawn to male society. Similarly, in her novel, *Disobedience* (1797) Alethea Lewis sees disobeying parental wishes as the "proper spirit" which Smith claims for Emmeline.

## 5. Disobedience

Although *Disobedience* (1797) is the title of Lewis' novel, I advisedly do not use italics for the heading of this section because the dilemma of young women like Sibilla in *Secresy* (1795) and Mary in *Disobedience* in deciding whether to obey or to disobey misguided parents, brothers or husbands, is a widespread one. Early on in the novel Lewis makes clear to the reader what her novel will be about. Addressing the reader, she writes:

The traffic of the human species is not confined to the shores of Africa. It is not alone the West Indian planter, who makes the groans and captivity of his fellow creatures the road to wealth. He it is true, manacles the limbs, and lacerates the body; but the avaricious or the ambitious parent, who in the marriage choice, makes his will the law to his child, restrains the dearer freedom of the mind, and tortures or vitiates the heart (1797:Vol.1:52).

This comparison between the position of women and the position of slaves is frequently made in contemporary writings; and Lewis uses both slavery and the lack of liberty in France under the Ancien Regime, to emphasise her points about the position of women. Equally, her use of the Gothic castle is the extreme example of the physical captivity offered women.

The novel opens with Mary being brought up in a well-tended Welsh cottage by two former servants of her mother's, Eleanor and Richard, since her mother has gone to India and could not take Mary with her. The implication here is that Eleanor and Richard are useful members of their community, especially when compared with their former employers, the aristocratic parents of Mary. She is educated by the vicar, Mr

Ellis, and then falls in love with another of his young pupils, William Challoner, the son of an uncouth local farmer who has other plans for his son. Richard, aware of the problem for Mary and William says: "Children often chuse ill, it is true, but parents always" (1797:Vol.1:65). The problem at first seems to be worse for William than for Mary, but as the narrative develops, we see how William manages to retain his freedom of action, while it is Mary whose sphere of action is limited. For the moment Mary circumvents the restrictions on their meeting, by decorating a cave "with mosses, fossils, grotesque pieces of wood, curious coloured leaves, or whatever else of similar ornaments had happened to fall in her way.....It was a spot inexpressibly dear to them both, and had lately become the receptacle of riches much more valuable than any that Mary had been accustomed to make it the depository of" (1797:Vol.1:72). These riches are William's books. The safe place is often one where there are books, and we shall find this occurring frequently in many of the novels. However, Mary's cave does not remain safe for long since she is hounded by Mr Wynne, the landlord of the local farms. One evening she decides to visit the cave: "As she approached this consecrated spot, she felt a longing desire, once more, to review its hallowed seats, and to feast her eyes with the initials of her own name, cut in ciphers on the sides of the cave with those of William" (1797:Vol.1:133). Here Lewis establishes Mary as an individual with her own name and needs. Wynne surprises her but, luckily, William happens to pass by and fells Wynne. This, however, only leads to William's father sending his son to another part of Wales.

Mary's subsequent place of tranquillity is Mr Ellis's garden and she spends some time here working in the garden and reading to Mr Ellis. The garden "was sheltered from every wind, and every intruder, by the high rocks that rose abruptly on every side but one" (1797:Vol.1:164). However, the garden cannot shelter her from the arrival of her mother and father to claim her back from Eleanor and Richard. They wish to take her to their estate in Bedfordshire and find a financially advantageous husband for her. I have dealt with some of the trials faced by Mary in the chapter on letter-writing, and also at the beginning of this chapter where Mary tries to persuade her parents that they should not imprison her. Mary is caught in that same magic circle that Emma Courtney complains of. Both these women characters are well educated and want to use their intelligence and learning to earn their own living. Mary argues with a Lady Harriet with whom she makes acquaintance over the kind of society they

are living in. Mary sees it as depending on idleness, particularly for women, whereas she reveres usefulness (1797:Vol.2:160). Lewis makes usefulness part of women's code of propriety in the society she envisages. Having refused her parents' choice of husband, Lord St.Albans, she is taken to their castle in Cumbria and locked in her room. A foiled attempt at escape to meet William now leaves her imprisoned once again and this time in darkness. Mary welcomes this if the alternative is marriage to St.Albans: " 'Oh my dear dungeon,' said she looking round her 'how I love you – your darkness, your solitude; what is there in the life to which I am invited, comparable to either?'" (1797:Vol.3:55). However, her parents have worse in store for her, bringing a frightening woman called Mrs McDowel to, as she says, "treat you as a maniac, who although incurable as to himself, must not the less submit to chains and stripes, for the security of others" (1797:Vol.3:87). It is reminiscent of the position of Wollstonecraft's Maria in her book *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). Mary, like Maria, is allowed access to books and she may play music and do needlework. After six months she begins to give up hope. "She felt completely insulated. The walls of her apartment – those of the garden, seemed, indeed, the boundaries of that space beyond which she was never to pass" (1797:Vol.3:133). However, it is the books that finally effect her escape. A very large book she reaches for, unexpectedly comes away loose in her hand and there is a secret door behind it.

After nearly being recognised once or twice by servants of her parents, she is found by William and they sail to Ireland where they plan to marry (1797:Vol.4:8). They are befriended by a Mr Eddows, whom William has met on a previous visit to Ireland, and he persuades them that they will find the life they want in America.

" 'Oh, turn your eyes to a land where there are no overgrown estates, with rich and ambitious landlords, to have undue and pernicious influence over the actions of their fellow creatures....Look to a land which is everybody's country'" (1797:Vol.4:63). Although Mr Eddows' praise for America is phrased in terms of class rather than of gender, the implication is that women will be equally free because they will be released from the necessity of marrying for financial reasons. William and Mary go to Kentucky which, it seems, Lewis is keen to promote as a place of plenty, without dangers from Indians, and as having been originally settled by Welsh Celts before the time of the Indians. It seems as if Lewis's Mary really has broken through Hays' "magic circle": she is delighted with the natural scenery and scenes of industry which

“swelled her pleasure to transport, and left her not the power to think of anything else” (1797: Vol.4:98). When the daughter of one of their friends calls it a horrid wilderness, Mary defends her belief in the usefulness of each individual, among whom she would include women: “if each individual were to be employed four hours every day in something useful, that labour would produce all the necessities and comforts of life for the whole society” (1797:Vol.4:125). When Lewis has to admit “the jealousy of the Indians” she explains it by referring to the “avarice of the English traders,” but this is not on the bank of the Ohio where Mary and William are about to settle. Lewis supports the optimistic viewpoint of her fictional character by quoting from Gilbert Imlay’s guide-book.<sup>15</sup>

Mary chooses the site for their house based on its resemblance to the one where she once lived in Wales. Lewis is signalling here that America will be as safe for Mary as Wales was earlier on. Indeed, she and William prosper and have children and when Mary learns that her father has died she goes back to England to fetch her mother. She meets her old lover, Lord St.Albans, and tells him that America is a land of free people while in spite of Catherine’s reforms, Russia is still a land of slaves. Her mother is worried about the threat from Indians but Mary assures her that while wars continue in Europe, “our unfortunate contests with the Indians which are the only wars we have to fear, shock more our humanity than lessen our numbers and this warfare has now nearly ceased” (1797:Vol.4:232). In fact, her children are being looked after by an Indian woman. Mary’s mother reluctantly has to accept the new life her daughter offers her. I would argue that in some ways Lewis is inside a circle whose limits she has not fully understood herself, since she has allowed Mary a safe house and enough land to bring up a family with a husband she has chosen herself; while Hays, being more insightful, is not able to do the same for her fictional character, Mary Raymond. But perhaps, imagining America in the way Lewis does is the equivalent of Hays allowing Mary Raymond to narrate her life story. At least, Lewis realises that what she proposes for America is not possible in England. Lewis may also be aware that to allow a disobedient daughter to prosper in England might offend too many of her readers. By the time of her fourth novel *The Microcosm*

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<sup>15</sup> Imlay’s guide book, *A Topographical Guide to the Territories of North Western America* appeared in 1794.

(1800), Lewis allows her heroine, Harriet, to prosper in England, but, although full of the “proper spirit” of independence, outright disobedience is not required of her. In the next section, I examine *The Microcosm* and a novel with similar themes, *The Stepmother* (1799), by Helena Wells.

## **6. The Management of Estates: a proper role for women**

If good management of estates with liberty for wives and daughters can only be established in America in *Disobedience* (1797), Lewis is able to allow her heroine, Harriet Montagu, of *The Microcosm* (1801) to find a stable home and land in England, although not without many adventures which take her, even if not by her own choice, to America first. Similarly, Helena Wells is concerned in *The Stepmother* (1798: 1799) with how a woman, first as a governess, then a wife and stepmother, and finally a widow comes to terms with her position in society and is concerned with the development of her estates as part of her responsibility to society. Lewis’ novel, *The Microcosm* (1801), is centred around two branches of the Spencer family, one based at Spencer Aviary which is well managed; the other based at The Lodge consists of the Percivals, of whom the eldest son, Stephen, is hoping to inherit Spencer Aviary without having the necessary sense of responsibility towards family and the upkeep of estates. The development of Spencer Aviary has been carried out by the old Mr Spencer, grandfather to both branches of the family; he is interested in making sure that the people working on his estate have cottages with decent leases and access to advances of money for young artificers (1800:Vol.1:58). His grandchildren, in particular Lucy Spencer, share his view of how estates should be managed. Stephen Percival, however, does not share this view and wishes to marry Rebecca Bullion because she is an heiress, her father having made money in India (1800:Vol.2:11). However, there are two other young people at The Lodge, who exemplify Lewis’s idea of what responsibility should be like. One is Henry Seymour, a ward of Stephen’s father, and the other Harriet Montagu, whose mother, a sister of Stephen’s, died in London as an errant young woman. These two fall in love as members of a household that does not recognise Harriet’s talents nor wish her to marry Henry. Harriet finds that the only place she can safely meet Henry is somewhere in the garden (1800:Vol.1:241). When The Lodge burns down the Percivals have to move into the Aviary until a new house is built. In due course this is done, and Mr Spencer has a party at the Aviary to celebrate. Here Lewis also celebrates the Aviary as a

house and garden where people can be at ease in an “abode delightful to all who wished to join in public entertainments, while rural walks for sentimental friends, or more retired minds were allowed without observation of inquiry.....Arcadia in its meridian of perfection could not boast more elegant or more refined pleasures than Spencer Aviary” (1800:Vol.2:45-46). However, neither the new Lodge nor the Aviary can provide Harriet with a safe refuge, and, as I point out in chapter 4 on letter writing, she is tricked into a relationship with a local rake, Millemont, who then kidnaps her during an evening walk in the gardens (1800: Vol.2: 202).

Harriet is now in Millemont’s control. She tries to shout out of the carriage windows but they have “spring blinds that could be let down in an instant and which Millemont never failed to use, whenever any houses or passengers appeared in sight” (1800: Vol.3:83). She is taken to London to Portland Place “where he had purchased a tenement which on account of the privacy of the back apartments, seemed purposely framed for mischief” (1800:Vol.3:84). The woman whom Millemont employs to look after Harriet tells her with real irony that she is in a “house where she would be protected from every ill” (1800:Vol.3:87). This leads Lewis to compare the plight of women once again with slaves, likening the Millemonts of this world with those who buy slaves from Africa.

Will our readers excuse the above digression on the miseries of thousands of their brethren now slaves in Christian territories? Will they heave the sigh of pity and drop the tear of sympathy upon human woes? Or will they, indignantly shut the book and descant upon the absurdity of mixing such a subject with the incidents of a novel? (1800:Vol.3:94).<sup>16</sup>

Lewis extends this comparison by having Harriet respond to Millemont’s declaration of love with the words that she is “too much in the condition of a slave to talk upon a subject which required the determination of free-will” (1800:Vol.3:100). Like a slave, Harriet is drugged and taken aboard a ship sailing to the West Indies and again imprisoned in Millemont’s estate near Kingston, called Citron Grove. She escapes by in turn drugging her jailer, Hannah, with some stolen laudanum. She takes the key from Hannah, and manages to go through the garden and out into a wood where she climbs a cedar tree. Eventually she is befriended by a Mr and Mrs Herbert together

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<sup>16</sup> This is the point where she refers to women novelists as “sovereigns in our own province” (1800:Vol.3:95).

with their friend Mr Cumberland, and they take her to Philadelphia (1800:Vol.3:185). She takes his family name, Mansfield and agrees to pass as his relation.<sup>17</sup> Harriet is later taken back to England by the Herberts where she comes into contact with Mrs Herbert's brother whose estate, Rose Valley, is run in an ideal way, similar to Spencer Aviary. Here the tenant is given a "sufficient interest in the soil which he tilled, to encourage him to improve it, and, by the same, to consult his landlord's benefit and his own" (1800: Vol.4:15).

Eventually it is revealed that Harriet is not a Percival, but is Letitia Spencer, and was substituted at birth by a nurse to whom she had been sent to avoid whooping cough, and who reported her as dead. Lewis prolongs the narrative of troubles for the heroine, however, as her one time lover, Henry Seymour, has gone to the West Indies to search for her. Luckily, he is overtaken and brought back by a boat that is faster than the one he is sailing in, and comes to Rose Valley, which now belongs to him. Not only is it a well- kept estate, but the gardens are full of roses. "The surrounding grounds were laid out in a style similar to the building, and afforded many situations that to minds the least tinctured with romance, were absolutely enchanting.....It was in this place that Letitia first knew what mortals call real happiness" (1800:Vol.5.30). Here, Harriet/Letitia has found a place where she can be safe and useful, like Lewis's Mary in her novel *Disobedience* (1797). This time the place is in England and Lewis's moral is slightly different, with less emphasis on the wrongs caused by parents forcing their children to marry against the children's wishes; here the emphasis is on education. Lewis makes an appeal for women to have the sort of education that does not give them airs and graces suitable only for a life of luxury, but fits them with understanding. The implication is that Harriet, like Mary in America, will be doing something useful on the Rose Valley estate, so that men and women "might be useful as well as agreeable companions – or in other words, meet helps – to each other" (1800:Vol.5:75). However, Lewis wants to make clear she does not support what she sees as Mary Wollstonecraft's claim that women are superior to men: "it would puzzle even a Wollstonecraft to find the smallest pretext for the superiority of woman; equality being all that ever was contended for by the strongest female partisan" (1800:Vol.5:76). This time it is the Percival family who sail for

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<sup>17</sup> Lewis gives the reader a bird's eye view of Philadelphia by entitling her next chapter: "An aerial Tour without a balloon."



America, with Lewis hoping that America will make them into better people (1800: Vol.5: 140). This follows the foiled attempt by Stephen Percival to take over the Aviary, at the point where he does not yet know that Letitia has returned as the legal heir. At the end of the novel, Harriet/Letitia has found a house and estate where she can be free and safe. Lewis is at pains to remind her readers that her novel has the purpose of promoting morality, philanthropy and piety. She has the old Mr Spencer point out the dangers of Materialism, which some of the minor women characters like the Percival governess have displayed. The governess, Mrs Mitchell, is part of the Percival plot to have Harriet seduced by Millemont. Whether Lewis is aware of the irony here is uncertain, but I would argue that as a governess, Mrs Mitchell herself is caught within the same circle as Harriet, and only preserves her own limited freedom by conniving in the limitation of Harriet's freedom. Lewis sees the possibility of women's freedom in their education. She tells her readers at the end of the novel that some good may be collected even from a novel and that is of course where women can receive their education. She says: "We desire to have it understood that it is far from our intent to depreciate the study of ancient history, for which we have a high veneration; we only wish to have considered that that study does not absolutely monopolize improvement and that it is perfectly necessary for some people to write for those who cannot read Latin and Greek" so that they can read an "original composition ... in our native tongue" (1800:Vol.5:204). The novel is a proper place for women.

Lewis had already treated this theme in her novel *Plain Sense* (1799) where she shows how a woman with little education, Maria Villars, fails to be either a good mother to her daughter, Ellen, or to manage her house, Groby Manor. Ellen, in spite of her mother's attempts to deprive her of an education since "at six years old Ellen could scarcely read" (1799:Vol.1:39), is taken in hand by the vicar and his wife who educate her in arithmetic, geography, drawing, French and Latin, as well as sewing, music, chess, dancing, walking and playing shuttlecock (1799:Vol.1:54). She also takes part in gardening and botanical discussions with her cousin and friend, Henry. Ellen's mother, however, has been brought up by an aunt as her plaything with only music and dancing, and so has no interest in making Groby Manor her home although, as Lewis takes pains to tell the reader, it is such a delightful place: "it was warm and comfortable; provisions and coals were cheap and abundant; there was a good library,

and the air, clear and wholesome, gave colour to the cheek and vigour to the limbs” (1799:Vol.1:18). Maria, however, is not interested in the kind of education, as Mr Thornton, the vicar says “as will place all the useful energies of the understanding and all the virtuous propensities of the heart in conjunction with personal charms” (1799: Vol.1:70). Lewis then links this theme to the one of parental control over their children’s marriage. Henry wishes to marry Ellen, but, because he has just inherited an estate as a result of his elder brother’s death, his father will not let him consider Ellen, since she has no money. Ellen, in the hope of persuading Henry to be a dutiful son, agrees to be a dutiful daughter by marrying Sir William Ackland, her father’s choice. She is accused by Henry of betraying him but she has very little choice, herself. At Oakley, her new home, she wishes to make improvements on the estate, but her husband refuses to support her and is rude to the tenants and servants whom Ellen respects and wishes to help. Sir William says that the poor laws are quite adequate (1799:Vol.2:52). Ellen is refused the right to use her “useful energies”. She can do nothing right in Sir William’s eyes and he becomes so suspicious when Henry visits the house in order to see him, that he decides to take Ellen abroad to remove her from the possibility of meeting Henry (1799:Vol.2:197). In Dresden, they visit Sir William’s sister, and Ellen starts to learn German but she begins to realise that she is not safe anywhere with Sir William. He tells her to dismiss her German teacher with a sneering remark about her beliefs: “‘I know the new philosophy of matrimony, as with every thing else, is equality; but I believe we were united upon the old terms of the wife’s obedience and subordination.’ ‘I thought I understood,’ returned Ellen, ‘that you preferred receiving your rights in the free-will offering of love than in the tribute of duty’” (1799:Vol.2:228). Ellen’s plea for a companionable marriage that is not based on force goes unheeded by her husband. It seems that Lewis is suggesting that Henry and Ellen should have disobeyed Henry’s father.

Ellen is pregnant and her husband moves her to a hunting cottage in the mountains between Saxony and Bohemia. Ellen seems to have more in common with the local peasants than with her husband since she finds they are mostly able to read and that this “diffusion of knowledge was far from being an obstacle to any of the cares of the most assiduous housewifery” (1799:Vol.2:234). Here, Lewis is arguing for the possibility of women being proper housewives and being educated at the same time. It may be because of these friendships that Ellen’s husband decides to move again and

they leave for Prague but their carriage is overturned on the way. Eventually, they arrive at the house of a friend of Sir William's but Ellen spends a night on her own and then receives a letter from Sir William to say he is imprisoning her in this house as a punishment for her infidelity.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile she is kept prisoner but allowed books, harpsichord and writing materials (1799:Vol.3:43). She spends two years in captivity, giving birth and having to relinquish the child, and eventually learning German in spite of Sir William's prohibition. This becomes a useful attribute when one of the servants helps her to escape through a locked door in the garden.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the novel, after Sir William's death, she marries Henry, her daughter is returned, and the reader is left to imagine her doing good works on the Groby estate (1799:Vol.3: 256). The ending is Lewis's vindication of the title and the opening of the novel where Groby Manor is described in such detail: "Through the valley ran a clear stream, and there were a variety of pleasant and romantic walks on every side" (1799:Vol.1:16). This is contrasted with Ellen's place of incarceration in Germany, where the servant tries to cheer Ellen by taking her for walks outside the garden and into the woods, but of course Ellen is not free.

Lewis is always at pains to link the heroine's lack of freedom with parent, guardian or lover denying the importance of education and then attempting to force her into an unacceptable marriage. Even by the time of her last novel, *Rhoda* (1816),<sup>20</sup> Lewis still has this concern, although her heroine is not as successful as her sister heroines, Mary in *Disobedience* (1797), Ellen in *Plain Sense* (1799) or Harriet in *The Microcosm* (1800). Rhoda, an orphan, is brought up by an old gentleman in the country and makes friends with the vicar and his daughter, Frances. She falls in love with a visiting parson, Mr Ponsonby. Her only relatives are the Strictlands who have money and a very different view of the world. Mrs Strictland is prepared to help Rhoda and take her into society but Rhoda is unaware that Mrs Strictland's only motive is to have a young and beautiful woman with her to help her spend money (1816:Vol.1:152). Lewis highlights the difference between the countryside, a place where Rhoda has been safe and able to live the kind of life she believes in, and London, the place where Mrs Strictland will use her and try to arrange a financially

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<sup>18</sup> I refer in chapter 3 to Ellen's foiled attempts to reach the outside world by sending a letter in the baby's clothes once it is born.

<sup>19</sup> I analyse the part of the novel which relates her adventures and travel in chapter 6.

<sup>20</sup> I examine the book references in *Rhoda* in chapter 4.

successful marriage for her. Lewis describes the scene as Rhoda approaches London in the mail: "The thick and dense atmosphere, which was spread before her eyes, disgusted her; it seemed to deprive her of one of her senses; while, on the contrary, the scents, which soon assailed her on every side, left her no doubt but that she had preserved her power of smell uninjured" (1816: Vol.1:214). Here, Lewis signals London with its smells as the place that will lead to the destruction of Rhoda's happiness.<sup>21</sup> Mrs Strickland does not exactly imprison Rhoda, but offers her a miserable attic room and laughs at her clothes.

Rhoda is taken to another fashionable house in the country where she is introduced to possible husbands, Sir William and Sir James, neither of whom she is interested in. She meets one couple, the Randolfs whose views are more like her own and they invite Mrs Strickland and Rhoda to visit their house. Here Rhoda feels at home which is why Mrs Strickland is in a hurry to take Rhoda back to London (1816:Vol.1:202), where she pushes Rhoda into marriage with Sir James. At this point in the story, Lewis interrupts the narrative with an appeal: "Let mothers, who act the same part, pause for a moment before the unholy sacrifice is completed, and reflect on the awful responsibility which they incur" (1816:Vol.2:92). Readers may well wonder why Lewis does not have Rhoda disobey: it could be that in 1816 Lewis felt less certain about subversive heroines than she did twenty years earlier. Rhoda is very isolated as Sir James' wife and corresponds with her old friend, Frances, explaining that she hopes she can change some aspects of the society in which she now moves (1816:Vol.2:186). This is perhaps Lewis' apology to her readers that Rhoda may have the chance to change society even if she has not spirit enough to disobey its rules. Sir James who is very much older than Rhoda has fewer faults than Mrs Strickland, but Rhoda cannot find happiness with him. They settle on the Isle of Wight in a small cottage where Rhoda hopes that the sea might make up for her continual feeling of misery. However, she finds no solace, explaining to her husband, "The mind itself makes its own place" (1816:Vol.2:249). She would like to return to visit Frances because she thinks that would be a place where her mind would be at rest. Sir James takes her to Osbourne Park to meet his friend Lady Emily who is busy improving her estate. Rhoda becomes involved in this but Lady Emily is an

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Dickens was to do something similar in describing London fog at the beginning of *Bleak House* (1852-3).

unreliable friend, firstly because her improvements are of no benefit to her tenants, and secondly because she involves Rhoda in meeting Sir William. Sir James becomes jealous of Sir William and shoots himself (1816:Vol.3:301). Rhoda learns that Frances has married Ponsonby, so all that is left for her is to accept a cottage from the Randolfs which, with money from Sir James' relations, allows her a reasonable standard of living. Lewis's final comment is to hope her story will have shown "that nothing but a preferable love for the husband can sanctify the marriage-bond, and that chastity alone will not make a good wife" (1816:Vol.3:395). The reader has to assume that Rhoda, now without threats from Mrs Strickland who died shortly before, and without an unloved husband and other undesirable acquaintances, will be able to make the cottage a place where there is some peace for her. Unlike her sister heroines in Lewis's other novels she is less likely to be able to make a useful contribution to society.

Lewis has Rhoda express the opinion that the mind makes its own place but this is only half the truth: the mind is influenced by the material conditions and the pressures from other minds. Place is experienced through the body as well as through the mind and Lewis is aware of this since she compares women's position with that of slaves. Rhoda is not imprisoned on the Isle of Wight but her marriage to Sir James' is little better than a prison. She cannot leave the island and when she thinks about visiting her friend Frances she wishes she could fly because otherwise the journey would take so long. It is not often that heroines can find happiness in their place of imprisonment but unusually, Ellen, the heroine of Sara Elizabeth Villa Real Gooch's novel, *Fancied Events* (1799) is at one point imprisoned for debt in the Tolbooth in Edinburgh<sup>22</sup> and, for her, prison becomes a haven where she is safe from the sexual harassments she has had to endure in her previous lodgings. In fact, her former landlady, Mrs Montgomery, writes to her saying that since her re-marriage to Mr Shark (who was responsible for Ellen's imprisonment) she herself is a prisoner in her own house (1799:Vol.1:211). A well-wisher takes out a subscription to a circulating library for Ellen so she has books to read and the community within the prison, "the little Republic", becomes her family. Ellen's dilemma arises when her well-wisher pays for her discharge. "My prison doors were open but I knew not where to go"

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<sup>22</sup> I refer to this incident in chapter 4 to show the importance of circulating libraries.

(1799:Vol.1:252). Rhoda's imprisonment on the Isle of Wight provides her with no "little Republic." Perhaps, Lewis has signalled her later pessimism by using her heroine's name for the title: the meanings of the titles of her earlier novels imply that more might be expected from the heroine: *Disobedience*, *Plain Sense*, *The Microcosm*. On the other hand, Smith gives her heroines spirit although she sometimes uses names as titles: *Emmeline*, *Ethelinde*. The same is true of Helena Wells who, for her first novel, uses a generic title *The Stepmother* (1799) which in itself gives the reader no clues as to what to expect from the heroine although it might suggest there will be issues related to marriage, property, and children.

The heroine/narrator in Wells' *The Stepmother* reports that after her mother died, her father, a clergyman, arranged for her to work as a governess in the household of Sir Henry and Lady Glanville, where she had spent some time as a visitor, although she is of a lower class than the Glanvilles. The Glanville household is a wonderful place for enabling her to learn Italian, drawing, dancing and music, until the Glanville sons come home from Eton. She and Edward Glanville fall in love but the class difference makes it impossible for her to acknowledge Edward's advances. She is worried because "should anything arise to make my residence in Sir Henry's family less eligible than it had hitherto been, I had no asylum to fly to – no kind relation to receive me" (1799:Vol.1:34). Early in the narrative, Wells has established the well-worn theme that women have difficulties in finding their place in society. The narrator tries to avoid meeting Edward, which means she can no longer walk in the garden. She then finds a relation, a cousin of her mother's in Liverpool who will provide her with lodgings (1799:Vol.1:55). Even here, life has its difficulties for the narrator. She resents the false manners of people in trade and is worried about the only female friend she has because this friend, Emma Brummel, has been warned of the dangers of any female relying too much on another female; while Mr Brummel whom she meets at the Glanvilles, sees women "as created for the purpose of being subservient to the will of man, and who are on no account to be suffered to have an opinion of their own, but to follow implicitly whatever their lord and masters think proper for them to do" (1799:Vol.1:116). Lady Glanville claims that men with such views exist only in books. Wells, however, has more power than her narrator. In her preface, Wells claims that she has not written a novel that portrays the "marvellous and horrible," but on the contrary, she is concerned with "real life" (1799:v-vi). The

narrator's experiences, however, leave her in a position that is very "subservient" to what she imagines are the demands of the Glanvilles' aristocratic interests.

As far as the narrator is concerned, one of the men who does not share this view is Edward, but she feels duty bound to avoid him, and welcomes instead the advances of a Captain Wentworth whom she meets on holiday in Matlock where the Derwent's "crystal stream gurgling by me soothed me to peace" (1799:Vol.1:151). She marries Captain Wentworth whose wife has died in Jamaica and becomes stepmother to his four daughters. She finds peace for a time at Clarmont, Wentworth's house, because the neighbourhood "is not overrun by immense proprietors who are the bane of society; adding *house* to *house* and *field* to *field*, without reflecting how many families are deprived of bread in order to contribute to their aggrandisement" (1799:Vol.1:204). Here, Wells has the same project as Lewis. However, this time the narrator's peace is disturbed by the more general outbreak of war with America and Captain Wentworth has to join his regiment. His arm is shattered during the fighting and the ship bringing him home is wrecked. Nevertheless, he has left her enough money to extend her estates which she takes charge of, overseeing the crops herself. Eventually she moves south to Hampshire for the benefit of her stepdaughters where there is more likelihood of their finding the right sort of husband. One of her step-daughters, Charlotte, believes "women had seldom the power of choosing their place of residence" but when she becomes engaged to a Mr Austen, her stepmother knows his *will* "would never be exerted merely to show his prerogative, but for the happiness of those with whom he was connected" (1799:Vo.II:22). Mr Austen will be able to offer her stepdaughter the same kind of companionable marriage that Alethea Lewis demands for her heroines. However, even as a widow with money, the narrator's home is not trouble-free. This time she is plagued by Miss Hartley, a ward of Mr Austen's, who influences her two younger stepdaughters and entices them to London. She is warned about Miss Hartley: "rid your house of this heroine of romance, for none of those who adorn the page of a modern novel deal more in fiction, in regard to their family, fortune and connections, than this said damsel" (1799:Vol.II:125). Later when she and the daughters are reconciled she hears that Miss Hartley has been seen

in Bath at a concert by the famous Rauzzini<sup>23</sup>, sitting on a sofa with a swarthy woman whose money she has been using while pretending to befriend her (1799:Vol.II:191). The narrator's stepdaughters eventually "marry men of sense, and desirous of obtaining rational, well-informed companions," presumably will not go through the same vicissitudes as their stepmother (1799:Vol.II:238); they will, like most of Lewis' heroines, be able to make useful contributions to society within the bounds of behaviour acceptable to that male society.

It is perhaps Lewis' and Wells' Christian background that allows their heroines this escape route from the magic circle. With their willingness to compromise with the propriety demanded by male society, their heroines have the prospect after marriage of being happy and useful, living in a safe house; while Wollstonecraft's and Hays' heroines are still confined in the magic circle, which leaves them, at the end of the novel, in prison or leading a sad existence in a house with no prospect of happiness: the power of the writing lies in the analysis that points to the existence of the limits set on women's lives. The acceptance of their heroines as thinking beings, however, is not realised within the narrative. In the next chapter I examine novels where women are often in similar difficulties when they are travelling outside the house, which they are often forced to do, in their attempts to find ways to circumvent the limits set by society. My analysis highlights at the same time how those limits affect the representation of women's appearance in public.

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<sup>23</sup>It was this musician who caused Villa Real Gooch's downfall. Her husband accused her of infidelity and turned her out of his house, which was the beginning of all her "miserable experiences," as she calls them, in the preface to her novel, *Sherwood Forest*, which I refer to in chapter 4.



## Chapter 6: The Representation of Women's Difficulties in Public Spaces

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I explore how women novelists represent their women characters in public spaces beyond the house and garden, in order to see how far those public spaces might be outside the limits of men's designation of where it is proper for women to be.<sup>1</sup> Novels discussed in the last chapter show how despite the home being designated as women's sphere of influence, it can often become a threatening place for women. However, if their homes sometimes scare women characters in novels, then being active, or even just being seen in more public spaces, could be equally problematic; and yet it is clear, both in real life and in novels, that women have to move about, sometimes escorted, sometimes in pairs and groups, but also on their own. I argue that the woman going out beyond the house could be seen as a parallel for the woman sending her novel out into the public. In section 2 of this chapter, I discuss in more detail how the word "public" and the phrase "public eye" are used in novels. I then explore the implications of the term "walker" for women and refer to the problems faced by women as they walk through town or countryside. Women, however, can be in the "public eye" as they appear in balls, masquerades, parks, assembly rooms and galleries. These visits may be to other houses but on these occasions the house, to all intents and purposes, becomes a public space. Women are often accompanied by women chaperones, or once married, by their husbands, who may well wish their charges/wives to be seen and admired. In section 3, I explore how women novelists treat these forms of exposure to which their women characters may be subjected, in particular the difference between women who choose exposure themselves and those who are paraded by their menfolk. I follow this, in section 4, with an examination of the novels which describe their women characters travelling either as tourists or out of necessity. This includes an examination of ideas of the picturesque and sublime, which I touch on in chapter 1, with reference to how women can view and write about landscape when men have gendered the landscape as feminine. Section 5 ends the chapter with references to the depiction of women's moving from place to place in order to find work; and how the difficulties they encounter are represented.

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<sup>1</sup> See my discussion in section 2 of chapter 5 of how Julia Wright uses Pierre Bourdieu's idea of the individual's own sense of limits (note 3).

My argument is that outside the house women are very often represented as being at risk. If they travel on their own in a way that appears to lack propriety, men assume that these women have forfeited the right to respect or esteem. Men see the streets as belonging to them, and are worried about the presence of women just as they are worried about the presence of women writers in society generally. As I imply in chapter 1, Pierre Bourdieu's field, if taken as both metaphor and literal place, is not a level field for women (1984 and 1993); and Jurgen Habermas's public sphere, again as metaphor and physical place, is one where lower class women might be free to go about as workers and prostitutes, while middle and upper class women are more likely to be objectified and looked at, rather than esteemed as subjects taking part in the production of that public sphere (1989).

## **2. The Representation of Women in the Public Eye**

Walking is a dangerous term for women. Anne Wallace has pointed out how, for women, the idea of being a walker is a kind of sexual aberration and certainly implies promiscuity as in the words "streetwalker" and "walking out" (1994:22). Ann Bermingham, in discussing the link between the idea of the picturesque and fashion, refers to a most instructive passage from William Gilpin on his attitude to women making use of the streets to go from one place to another (1994:81-119). In his *Dialogues on Various Subjects* (1807), Gilpin has two men, Mr Wilson and Sir Charles talking about the streets as if they are not really the place for women. Mr Wilson suggests "'a censor might be appointed by authority at the corner of every street, to question each lady passenger on which errand she was bent; and if she would not give a good account of herself, to stop her progress'" (1807:152). Sir Charles is not entirely convinced because he knows the women would have reasons such as going to the opera, play, a rout, or shopping. However, he has to admit:

'It would keep many a gadding female out of mischief, it would save the shopkeeper much trouble, it would make the streets more comfortable and commodious for those who had real business; - and above all it would keep mothers from misleading their daughters' (1807:153).

It seems clear that, although Gilpin offers the reader a dialogue which theoretically could present more than one point of view, neither of these gentlemen thinks that women have any “real business”<sup>2</sup> which would justify them walking in the street.

The word strolling is suspect, even when not used in association with walking but when referring to players. Mary Robinson who knew about the acting world has her heroine, Martha Morley in *The Natural Daughter* (1799),<sup>3</sup> become a strolling actress when she has no other source of income. She has been ejected from her house by her husband and, unable to publish her novel, she makes an income out of acting, but realises this makes her unrespectable. Martha finds her long-lost sister, Julia, through meeting a servant who has come to a bookseller on behalf of her mistress. Martha asks to see Julia but Julia writes to say she will never accept a sister who is a strolling actress (1799:49). Later, when she goes to Lady Eldercourt in an attempt to gain patronage for her poetry, one of the ladies present recognises her and says: “‘It is evident she has been used to appear in public...by her uncommon boldness” (1799:113). The word “public” is used here to label a woman as someone who speaks too boldly for her sex. Her former life as a strolling actress results in her being ostracised again some time later, when she becomes a companion to a young heiress, Sophia, whose stepmother is jealous and uses the fact that she has been a strolling actress to belittle her. In fact, the stepmother is able to plot against her daughter and companion in such a way that Martha, in defending Sophia, is taken to an asylum and badly treated (1799:128). Respectable women do not “appear in public”, and acting is one extreme of the range of public appearances women might make.

This is why the women who try to emulate Madame de Staël’s Corinne in *Corinne or Italy* (1805) are so frowned upon. In chapter 2 on women characters who are writers, I refer to two novels, Mrs Foster’s *The Corinna of England* (1809) and Ann Harding’s *The Refugees* (1824), which use Corinne’s public speaking as a focus for attacking women who make a spectacle of themselves in public. At least an author does not have to appear in public personally: only her words are made public when her novel is published. Mrs Foster grudgingly admits that “Madame de Staël has certainly

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<sup>2</sup> I accept that Gilpin refers to middle-class women. I analyse Gilpin’s view of the picturesque in section 4 of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> I examine this novel in chapter 2 when exploring the role of women characters who write, and also in chapter 5 with reference to women being imprisoned in a madhouse.

displayed great genius and learning” but that her own heroine, Miss Moreton, “had neither judgment or knowledge to appreciate the beauty or the truth” of what Madame de Staël was writing (1809:47). She shocks her friends by her behaviour in public, for example, standing outside the door of a public house drinking a half pint of cider. She is, in some ways, like Maria Edgeworth’s character, Harriot Freke, in her novel *Belinda* (1801) whose main interest seems to be dressing up as a man and shocking as many people as possible.

On one occasion, Miss Moreton decides to address the people of Coventry as she finds herself passing through on the day the local people are commemorating Lady Godiva. What makes Miss Moreton’s speeches so much more unacceptable than the improvisations of de Staël’s Corinne, is that Corinne uses poetry and song to remind the people of Rome of their history, while Miss Moreton is presented by Mrs Foster as no more than a rabble-rouser: “ ‘Ye citizens of Coventry, free men of an ancient city, behold this another woman speaks! Another woman asserts the glorious prerogative of her sex, the bold freedom of thought and of action, hitherto so exclusively, so unjustly confined to men alone!’ ” (1809:47). She accuses the people of being merely ribbon-makers when they might be poets, heroes and painters. Her aunt, Mrs Moreton, is worried:” ‘My niece is become the public cry, and the public odium; she is called an incendiary.....The whole town of Coventry was a scene of riot and confusion last night; and the mob were only dispersed by the military this morning’ ” (1809:58). Here Mrs Foster uses the word “public” as a term of abuse in connection with the activities of her main woman character. Even when Miss Moreton is being less of an incendiary, she still manages to upset her more conservative companion, Mary, when they go to London: “Mary Cuthbert wondered that Miss Moreton should prefer walking the streets unprotected, to going in a carriage;” and Mrs Foster explains sarcastically: “but she had not read Corinna, (sic) else she would have known that, in strict obedience to her model, Miss Moreton took this pedestrian excursion. Corinna had walked over Rome with Lord Nelville” (1809:93). Mrs Foster describes the way that Miss Moreton “attracted general notice by her extra-ordinary deportment” (1809:93) and, as I explain in chapter 3, Mrs Foster delivers her retribution to Miss Moreton by having her killed in a fire at Covent Garden. Mary is aware that walking lays women open to the charge of making a spectacle of themselves. However, women may have business they have to conduct and walking is

their only way of moving from one place to another. These women characters have no intention of drawing attention to themselves in any way, but are nevertheless at risk from men who think it is not proper for unattended women characters to be seen on their own.

One of these women characters is Juliet in Alethea Lewis's *The Discarded Daughter* (1810). Juliet is ejected from her home in Suffolk by a jealous step-mother and goes to London but cannot find her friends, the Courtneys, because their house has been burnt down. She takes lodgings with a Mrs Browne who is friendly but unable to protect her from the unwanted visits from her rich relation, Lord Montford. Juliet feels that the streets have become dangerous for her: "When Juliet was sure of Lord Montford's being gone from London, she indulged herself in walking an hour or two each day in paths not thronged with either the great or the gay" (1810:Vol.3:178). On one occasion, she walks to the Poultry to buy some silks for Mrs Browne and loses her glove in the shop. When she starts on her way home, a gentleman passing takes her for a prostitute because she has a bare arm, and when he realises she is not, he suggests she should put her glove on. Juliet therefore hurries into a glover's in Cheapside in order to make her street appearance less suspect. The glover says he has no fine gloves, but Juliet assures him she only wants them for walking and so an ordinary pair will do. Juliet is in difficulty however she behaves: in the fashionable parts of London she risks being harassed by libertine members of the aristocracy, while in the poorer parts of London without gloves, she risks being taken for a prostitute (1810:Vol.3:194). She has in fact had a similar experience a few days earlier in Vauxhall, even though as far as the reader knows she may have been wearing gloves, but her mistake is to remain seated on a bench on her own while the rest of the mixed party she is with moves a few steps forward to listen to the orchestra. When she is approached by a gentleman, (in fact, her first encounter with Cleveland, the glover) she has rapidly to explain to him that she is with the people just in front of her (1810:Vol.3:145). Alethea Lewis is showing the reader how difficult it is for a young woman to know how to behave with propriety and her sympathies are with her character, Juliet.

By contrast, Elizabeth Hamilton in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) depicts a young woman, Bridgetina, having difficulties in London streets, but with whom she

has very little sympathy. In this case, Hamilton is mocking Bridgetina for being a Wolstonecraftian philosopher who does not understand the ordinary ways of the world, but she is unfair to her heroine since she is a provincial girl who cannot be expected to know about London street life. Bridgetina, dressed in inappropriate clothes, has arrived, uninvited, at a party given by Mrs Fielding, and is surprised to discover that no-one at the party has read any of the books she is interested in. She leaves the party and on, her way home, she meets two girls in the street, presumably prostitutes, or at least pickpockets, and is teased by them. They knock her down and when she cries out and someone comes to help, the girls claim she is Poll Madoc who has been condemned for pickpocketing. Bridgetina is about to be arrested and imprisoned when, luckily for her, Henry, one of her acquaintances passes by and saves her (1800:Vol.3:41). Hamilton allows Bridgetina to be saved, but since Hamilton's intention is to belittle Bridgetina at all costs, the reader is left feeling that Hamilton thinks Bridgetina has only herself to blame. By contrast, Fanny Burney, has a far more radical viewpoint in *The Wanderer* (1814) about the difficulties of women moving about on their own.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the subtitle of the novel is *Female Difficulties* and, right from the opening, the reader is aware of the scorn poured on the nameless heroine by the rest of polite society, because she has no money for the coach journey from Dover to London, having had to plead with the captain of the boat in which they crossed the channel, to take her on board. She appears to have lost her purse, but most of the party cannot accept her because she looks like a vagabond, and, what is worse, a dark-skinned one. Elinor, who we soon discover to be progressive and a supporter of the French Revolution, teases her friend, Harleigh, for taking pity on the woman: " 'Can you really credit that anything but a female fortune hunter would travel so strangely alone, or be so oddly without resource?' " (1814:1991:Vol.1:30). The stranger, as Burney calls the unknown woman who refuses to give her name, is taken to London, and eventually Mrs Maple and her niece, Elinor, take her to Lewes. When the stranger says she must now get to Brighthelmston, she says she supposes she must walk there. Harleigh, who is one of the party in Lewes, asks if she really means to walk "in such a season? and by such roads?" Ireton, although a less compassionate member of their circle, repeats: 'Walk?...eight miles? In December?'" showing surprise, if not compassion, but Mrs Maple has no such scruples. " 'And why

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<sup>4</sup> Burney had already explored in *Evelina* (1788) the danger of a young woman on her own in Vauxhall not recognising prostitutes.

not gentleman,' called out Mrs Maple, 'how would you have such a body as that go, if she must not walk? What else has she got her feet for?'" (1814:1991:Vol.1:61). Mrs Maple regards her as no better than a servant, while Harleigh, thinking her better than a "female fortune-hunter", procures her a seat in a farmer's cart that is going on a message for him, and she gratefully accepts. Elinor arranges for her to return to Lewes, but Mrs Maple is still unaccepting and when Elinor encourages the stranger to join their local acting group, Mrs Maple refers to her as a "foundling girl" and an "illegitimate stroller" (1814:1991:Vol.1:86). Where Mrs Foster and Elizabeth Hamilton satirise the woman walker, Alethea Lewis to some extent, and Burney very strongly, reserve their mockery for members of society like Mrs Maple who have no understanding of women's difficulties.

Towards the end of *The Wanderer* (1814), Burney's heroine finds herself having to walk to avoid her supposed French husband and spends some time walking from one refuge to another in the New Forest. She is disguised and is often tired, hungry and frightened. At one point, she decides "to make no further application but to females; since countrymen, even those who are freest from any evil designs, are almost all either gross or facetious" (1814:1991:Vol.4:668). Most of the time she has no energy or spirit to admire the countryside, and, too often, she is caught in woods and thickets, not knowing which way to go, but one evening she climbs a hillock and is impressed by "the beauties" which were "sublimely picturesque." For a few minutes nature and heaven "composed her spirits and recruited her strength" (1814:1991:Vol.4:676), but she has many more frightening experiences in store and when she does find hospitality, it is short-lived because of the danger of discovery. She is aware, too, how the local women cannot appreciate the picturesque because of their work, and if they walk it is only to meet their sweethearts (1814:1991:Vol.4:697).<sup>5</sup> A little later, when she is about to be caught by her husband at an inn where she has sought refuge, it is the elderly Sir Jaspar who saves her and takes her in his carriage, first to Wilton house and then to Stonehenge where he encourages her to take a walk. She wanders "amidst these massy ruins, grand and awful, though terrific rather than attractive" and "this grand, uncouth monument of ancient days had a certain sad, indefinable attraction, more congenial to her distress than all the polish, taste and

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<sup>5</sup> I examine the picturesque in more detail in section 4 of this chapter.

delicacy of modern skill” (1814:1991:Vol.5:765). For a moment it seems as if Juliet has found a protective circle, where she is safe, rather like Mary Raymond in Hays’ *Victim of Prejudice* (1799)<sup>6</sup> when she escapes from Sir Peter (1799:1996:122) but just as for Mary, the discovery of William’s marriage makes the circle unsafe once more, so for Juliet, does the arrival of Sir Jaspar with his mocking information that these stones are Druids staring her in the face. The effect on Juliet is to render her unable to make any “reflections, save upon her own misery,” or “combinations, that were not relative to her own dangers” (1814:1991:Vol.5:766-7). Sir Jaspar respects her demands to be left alone, but this again leaves her at the mercy of a country woman in Milton Abbas. At the end of the novel, Juliet’s wanderings on foot <sup>7</sup> come to an end with her marriage to Harleigh. The image of the enclosed circle is invoked again when Burney compares Juliet’s difficulties to those of Robinson Crusoe, “as unaided and unprotected, though in the midst of the world, as that imaginary hero in his uninhabited island; and reduced either to sink, through inanition, to non-entity, or be rescued from famine and death by such resources as she could find, independently, in herself” (1814:1991:Vol.5:873). It is significant that Burney has chosen an island as an image for the site of women’s difficulties. Juliet has independent resourcefulness but, finally, it is Sir Jasper who arrives in time to save her from being returned to France to an even worse desert island. Furthermore, just before using this image of the desert island, from which Juliet has escaped, Burney lets us know about the difficulties that are still in store for Elinor, Juliet’s alter ego, with more radical views, but less compassion and willingness to make sacrifices; and who, like Emma in Hays’ *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) has unsuccessfully made approaches to the man she loves. The implication is that her problems are not solved: her wanderings may be metaphorical rather than literal, but the magic circle is still in place for her in her realisation that “she has strayed from the beaten road, only to discover that all others are pathless!” (1814:1991:Vol.5:873).

Juliet, like other heroines, also has problems with appearances in public of another sort and that is with giving recitals and acting in public. Harleigh pleads with her not to injure her position as a respectable woman by performing in public, even within the local community (1814:1991:Vol.2:338). Constantia, the Corinne character in Anne

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<sup>6</sup> I discuss this in more detail in chapter 5 on houses.

<sup>7</sup> She has further difficulties in trying to obtain work.



Harding's *The Refugees* (1822), avoids the fate allotted to Miss Moreton by her author, Mrs Foster, by renouncing her role as public speaker. She, however, is not a rabble-rouser, she is an improvisatrice in true Corinne-like style. Nevertheless, as I point out in chapter 3, it is the public nature of her performances that worries her lover, Lord de Courville. He cannot bear the thought that his wife "should become seen and known of all men" (1822:Vol.1:180) even though there is never the least chance that Constantia will be drawn into speaking on behalf of the United Irishmen when she comes back to Ireland, in the way Miss Moreton speaks on behalf of the ribbon-makers of Coventry. However, Lord de Courville does not believe that a "female, accustomed to public exhibition" could then find happiness in "the domestic only" (1822:Vol.1:180). It is a sacrifice for Constantia, but she makes it, and in the process, disgusts another of her more radical suitors, Louis, who says that if only he had met her earlier "her public life should have been my pride" (1824:Vol.2:160). However, Constantia does not disappear from the public eye because, as a woman married into the English aristocracy, Lord de Courville takes her to London where "with inexpressible delight" he "saw his wife the gaze of every public place" (1824:Vol.3:159). She can become the object of men's gaze as a wife because she is her husband's property, but if she remains a public speaker, she would retain her own position as subject which a husband cannot accept. It is as if her body and her beauty belong to him, but her mind and her public speech he would not feel he could own. This use of the word "public" arises again in a novel called *Family Anecdotes*, by Sophia T., published in *The Lady's Magazine* in 1807. This is the description of Mary Gordon at Bath: "In the public rooms her vivacity was enchanting; on the public walks her appearance was fascinating; but in a tete a tete with her husband she was ever complaining of vapours and low spirits" (Jan.1807:9). She may not be a Corinne talking in public, but in Mary's case, unlike Constantia in *The Refugees* (1824), the very act of walking in public and appearing in the public rooms seems to make her unfit for her duties towards her husband at home.

This idea of the woman being looked at in public as the spectacle, as long as she is not the spectatrice, is discussed by Mary Favret in an analysis of Helen Maria Williams in Paris (1993:273-295). It is almost as if Williams, in real life, manages to be what Anne Harding cannot allow her character, Constantia, to be: spectatrice as spectacle. Favret argues that: "As Williams enters into the French mode of representing the

revolution, the mode of public spectacle, she domesticates it; as the revolution unveils an Englishwoman's private theatrical, it also becomes her stage" (Favret:1993:278). In her letters from France, Favret claims, Williams filters the public spectacle of the revolution through her own domestic approach: "Public, historical value relies upon and is measured by private affect; its force depends upon the vulnerability, the penetrability of the individual but general heart" (Favret:1993:283). Favret quotes a passage from one of Williams' letters describing an occasion at dinner in her house where "the women seemed to forget the task of pleasing, and the men thought less about admiring them.....a mutual esteem, a common interest in the great issues of the day were what manifested themselves most" (Favret:1993:283). Favret concludes: "Until a society that erases the walls between a woman's place and the public forum is realised, rather than imagined, the work of women like Helen Maria Williams may remain spectacular – and virtually unknown" (Favret:1993:295). Williams uses her salon as a backdoor to the male public sphere and is able to maintain this when she is imprisoned as well.<sup>8</sup> The distinction used by Williams between admiration and esteem is the same as the distinction made by the correspondent of *The Lady's Magazine* I refer to in chapter 2, where he claims women writers may be admired as writers but cannot be esteemed as women, only here Williams reverses the use of the words, and claims that women and men should be able to esteem each other when they discuss "the great issues of the day." Williams continues her salons and reports from France and Switzerland beyond the revolutionary period and her later reports appear during the same period that Mrs Foster's and Anne Harding's heroines are being satirised for similar activities, the very activities which Jurgen Habermas (1989) claims as the basis for the growth of the public sphere. To extend this in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1981 and 1993), it becomes difficult for women to increase their cultural capital when their participation in these activities is resisted. In the next section I examine some of the problems faced by women in real life and their fictional counterparts in their attempts to enter a range of places connected with cultural life.

### 3. The Depiction of Art Galleries, Theatres and Masquerades

Outings to places of amusement and pleasure were very different experiences for men

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<sup>8</sup>It must have been rather like the Isle of Man in the Second World War where enemy aliens were imprisoned but managed to maintain and make new friendships and cultural connections, such as the formation of the Amadeus Quartet (reported to the writer by a relative who was in the Isle of Man).

and women, because in all these places women themselves became part of the spectacle. This aspect of public places is well illustrated in a print by Thomas Rowlandson (1800) of the stair-case in Somerset House where the Royal Academy Exhibitions took place. Rowlandson has titled his print “Stare Case” as a punning comment on what occurs.<sup>9</sup> In K.Dian Kriz’s article explaining the print and the context of its production, she claims: “It is typical of Rowlandson that the comic charge of this image derives largely from the sight of male connoisseurs leering at the cascade of semi-nude female bodies strewn along the staircase in revealing and provocative poses” (2001:55). Kriz explains that it is not just a question of satirising the male gaze: men needed the presence of women in order to soften and civilize their otherwise too masculine approach to art. Nevertheless, Kriz also quotes critical reports from newspapers and magazines to show that it was accepted that men came to look at the women as well as look at the art. As a letter in the *Morning Post* of 3 May 1785 explained: “there are two descriptions of persons who visit the Royal Academy. Some perambulate the rooms to view the heads – others remain at the bottom of the stairs to contemplate the legs” (cited in Kriz:2001:61). Another letter of 8<sup>th</sup> May 1787 from the *World Fashionable Advertiser* referred to the “raree-show of neat ancles up the staircase” (cited in Kriz:2001:62). Kriz argues that the male visitors needed the women for the more serious purpose of civilising them and this is proved by other letters to the press complaining of the nude male statues that women might be faced with. There is no suggestion that women should not come to the exhibition: the writer asks that these statues should not “be obtruded on their view” and by implication suggests they be placed in rooms that women are less likely to visit. It is as if the men are coming together to form the public sphere as described by Jurgen Habermas (1989), as I explain in chapter 1, and the women are there too, not on equal terms, but in order to make the public sphere more civilised. Women novelists are equally aware how the presence of women may help to civilise the world of men. Maria Edgeworth explores this issue in her novel *Belinda* (1801) where she makes use of a visit to Somerset House as part of her narrative to show the uncivilised behaviour of some of her male characters.

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<sup>9</sup> It is reproduced in the catalogue to the *On the Line* (Solkin:2001:54) exhibition held in Somerset House in 2001. See appendix 8.

Although Edgeworth does not describe a cascade of female bodies down the railings, as in Rowlandson's print, she is as aware as Rowlandson of the reprehensible behaviour of some of her uncouth male characters. She has Lady Delacour take Belinda to the exhibition. In the first place it seems that Lady Delacour wants to go because there are "charming pictures this year" and also because it will be useful to her daughter, Helena "who really has a genius for drawing"(1986:169). However, only the day before she has told Belinda when they were going to a museum at Maiallardet's to see a mechanical bird, the place would be too hot for her and she would take a walk in the park instead. The reader thinks that perhaps Lady Delacour has an ulterior motive. Maria Edgeworth certainly has an ulterior motive because the visit to the exhibition allows her to satirize two libertine men, and also to let Lady Delacour check Belinda's reaction to hearing that one of the portraits they see is of the mistress of Clarence Hervey, whom Belinda feels is a sensitive man. The two members of the aristocracy, Sir Philip Badely and Mr Rochfort, whom Lady Delacour and Belinda meet on the stairs, are plainly not there for the art: they are "leaning over the banisters, and running their little sticks along the iron rails to try which could make the loudest noise" (1801:1986:71). When Lady Delacour asks them if they have been pleased with the pictures, Sir Philip's first reply is: " 'Oh, damme, no 'tis a cursed bore'" (1801:1986:71). They then take great pleasure in directing the two women to a portrait, hinting, all the while, that they will enjoy it because it is to Clarence Hervey's taste, and making a joke about the fact that although it is not a history painting, it is part of Hervey's family history. Belinda recognises it as a portrait of Virginia from St. Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* (1787), the clue being the tropical scenery with cocoa trees and plantains. Sir Philip and Rochford are delighted with her insight because they know that Hervey had the portrait of his supposed mistress painted like this and that he actually called her Virginia St.Pierre. Belinda overhears their whispers, made as if quietly to Lady Delacour, and her confusion convinces Lady Delacour that Belinda is in love with Hervey and is not in love with Lord Delacour. Lady Delacour sends the two men for a catalogue so that she can reassure Belinda that Hervey would never marry the girl. At that moment, Hervey himself appears and enthuses about the painter who has caught the imagination of St Pierre as if St Pierre was a poet rather than a novelist. When Sir Philip returns with the catalogue, he cannot read it properly and shows his ignorance of both painting and literature by thinking that St Pierre must be the name of the painter. It is not only

Lady Delacour who uses the visit to the art gallery to test Belinda. Hervey takes the opportunity of meeting Belinda there to ask her if the rumour of her being interested in Lord Delacour in the event of the death of Lady Delacour is true (1801:1986:174). Later in the story, the portrait in Somerset House becomes a way of Hervey trying to trace Virginia's father, who abandoned her as a child and is now apparently looking for her. The artist promises Hervey to spend every day at the exhibition by the portrait to talk to any visitor who might ask questions about the picture (1801:1986:358).

Curiously, Kriz reports a newspaper article from the *Morning Herald* on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1786 which refers to a young woman who planted herself daily under her portrait: "If a certain smiling belle is determined to exhibit the original as well as the semblance to the visitors at the Royal Academy by placing herself every day directly under her own portrait; we would advise her to desire her cicisbeo to whisper his soft nonsense in lower tones" (cited in Kriz: 2001: 61). It is possible Maria Edgeworth knew of this report and based her story partly on it. If so, she is using this story to emphasise the sensibility of Hervey, in contrast to the two badly behaved members of the upper classes. Describing a visit to an art gallery in a novel is one way for an author to reveal the difference in behaviour between her civilised female and male characters, and her less civilised male characters. In *Memoirs of Young Philosophers* (1800), Elizabeth Hamilton makes one of her responsible characters, Mrs Fielding, take two of her young women charges, Maria and Harriet, to an exhibition of paintings. Dr Orwell, Harriet's father, who is with them, remarks on a painting of savages, how they are very like some young men at the exhibition, who are sitting on a seat, not offering it to an old lady, and at the same time seem to have no interest in the pictures. Perhaps, Hamilton is suggesting that the young men are more interested in Maria and Harriet. Hamilton is certainly aware that a great many of the places where young women congregate are simply market places for marriage. Carradine, one of the young men who would like to marry Harriet, writes to his friend Henry from Bath, saying that Dr Orwell was horrified at the marriage market in India, but adding, "had he come to Bath, he might have beheld a perpetual fair, where every ball-room may be considered as a booth for the display of beauty to be disposed of to the highest matrimonial bidder" (1800:Vol.3.256). Yet the message of Hamilton's novel is that women who rely on their intellect and read the new philosophy are likely to commit

worse sins of the flesh, like Julia who becomes a fallen woman, and has to take refuge in Mrs Fielding's asylum (1800:Vol.3:345). The ball-room scene is often depicted as hard for young women to deal with. Fanny Burney's *Evelina* commits social offences because she does not know the etiquette pertaining to dancing partners and the fact that having refused one partner, you cannot then accept another (Burney:1778:1984:Vol.1:28-34). In Alethea Lewis's novel, *Rhoda* (1816), it is at a ball held by Mrs Strickland that Rhoda receives the marriage proposal from Sir James, whom she does not like, let alone love, but finds she has not the social understanding, nor power in relation to her guardian, to refuse (1816:Vol.2:13).

Another public place that women characters have to negotiate is the theatre and opera: the women are prey to what Sophia Lee, in *The Life of a Lover* (1804), has her character, Cecilia, call "the opera-glass survey" (1804:Vol.3:224).<sup>10</sup> Like galleries or museums, it is the place where women are expected to be present as spectacle as well as audience. If they are fortunate, they can be audience only and return home to enthuse about what they have seen, as *Evelina* does after first seeing Mr Garrick. As she writes to her guardian, Mr Villars: "O my dear Sir, in what raptures am I returned! Well may Mr Garrick be so celebrated, so universally admired – I had not any idea of so great a performer.....I intend to ask Mrs Mirvan to go to the play every night while we stay in town" (Burney:1788:1984:Vol.1:26). They may, on the other hand, be spotted by the "opera-glass survey" but nevertheless welcome the intrusion, as *Evelina* does when Lord Orville visits the Mirvan box.<sup>11</sup> It does not remain such a positive experience for *Evelina* every time. On a later occasion, she is separated from her party at the end of the performance and is helped into a coach by Sir Clement Willoughby who then tries to seduce her (1788:1984:Vol.1:96-100). It is as if a woman on her own at the theatre can be considered fair game: Cecilia in Sophia Lee's novel is aware of the danger of being on her own since she refers to a Mrs Layton, recently returned from France, as someone who "ridiculed our English mode of going to public places in couples" (1804:Vol.3:223). Cecilia reports to Amelia that she has seen Lord Westbury at the theatre and in a letter from Lord Westbury to one of his

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<sup>10</sup> I refer to this incident in more detail in chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Cassatt's painting *At the Opera* (1879:Museum of Fine Arts:Boston) has a woman in a box using her opera glasses for the stage, while further round the gallery, a man is training his opera glasses on her. It is the same idea as in Emily Osborn's painting I refer to in chapter 1, where two men are leering at a woman trying to sell her painting in a dealers' shop (Osborn:Private Collection). See appendix 9.

friends, he describes the same incident, writing that Cecilia “is too new to the box-lobby train yet to allure them” (1804:Vol.3:241). Nevertheless, he follows her carriage from the theatre. The “box-lobby train” is always in wait for women at the theatre, as Alethea Lewis shows in her novel, *The Microcosm* (1801). When Harriet is living with the Herberts on her return from America, she is invited to a play which has been written by a widow with five children. When she hears the Herberts are unable to go, she feels duty bound to support the play, and finds herself going to the theatre with two young milliners who received the tickets in place of the Herberts. An unknown gentleman comes to talk to Harriet; presumably he feels free to do so, since she is sitting with two lower-class women. She and the two milliners manage to avoid his attentions, but the Herberts’ step-sister who is jealous of Harriet, has seen the incident, and uses it to spread a rumour that Harriet is a loose woman from Jamaica who welcomes that sort of approach from an unknown admirer. The rumour reaches Lord Andover who is revealed later as Seymour, Harriet’s earlier lover, and it is some time before he can make enquiries and finally dismiss the rumour (1801:Vol.4:35-63). In her novel, *Constantia Neville or the West Indian Maid* (1800), Helena Wells describes her heroine being importuned at the theatre in order to depict the unacceptable behaviour of Lord Rochford. She is taken to the theatre to see Mrs Siddons by her brother’s friends, the Mansell sisters, but since he has been mixing with aristocratic gamblers she does not approve of, she is not pleased to have to receive their addresses at the theatre. On the subsequent night at the opera, she is accosted by Lord Rochford, a married man who had importuned her when she had lived in his house some time earlier, as a childhood friend of his wife’s. She now has difficulty reaching her house safely, because of some confusion over coaches and horses (1800:Vol.2:125-31). Wells makes it clear that Lord Rochford and his friend, Mr Athersey, go to the theatre, not so much for the play, but for the women who they may be able to meet in the audience.

This dilemma for women of being both spectator and spectacle is highlighted in Hannah More’s *Strictures on Female Education* (1799) where she claims that if a woman were no more than an “outside form and face” whose mind did not matter, “it would follow that a ball-room was quite as appropriate a place for choosing a wife, as an exhibition room for choosing a picture” (1799:1996:229). However, since mind does matter, it would be better if there was a different place for viewing them. She

argues that once a husband brings home a picture, it stays where he places it, but a wife “picked up at a public place, and accustomed to incessant display, will not it is probable, when brought home stick so quietly to the spot where he fixes her; but will escape to the exhibition room again, and continue to be displayed at every subsequent exhibition, just as if she were not become private property, and had never been definitely disposed of” (1799:1996:229). What is interesting in More’s analysis is not her rejection of the ball-room as marriage market, but her acceptance of the metaphor of wife as viewable “private property” to be “disposed of”. More does not make it clear where men are to find their wives except that in the succeeding paragraphs she does refer to church, and also to the duty of women to foster “the love of fireside enjoyments” once they are married, so, presumably, men will have to view their future wives at their parents’ fireside. But that space, as I argue in chapter 6 on houses, is not necessarily the most comfortable one for women. It is the idea that women are to be viewed, even if that includes their minds as well as their bodies, that is the problem. In earlier passages in *Strictures on Female Education* (1799), More argues that it is the passion among young women for reading novels from circulating libraries that causes them to turn into the kind of women fit only to be “picked up” in ball-rooms (1799:1996:166 and 171). Yet, so many of the novelists I have examined, use the narrative of their novels to argue against precisely what More accuses them of perpetrating: they argue instead for a companionable marriage. More also fears that reading novels will turn young girls into novel-writers. Yet again, as I show in chapter 2, there are very few heroines who write novels, and even fewer who continue to write after marriage. I would argue that novelists like Alethea Lewis, Amelia Beauclerc and Amelia Opie are using the novel to make the same point that Hannah More is making; and of course More employs the novel, herself, in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), though there is so much preaching by the male narrator, that I would argue that not many young women would have enjoyed More’s novel.<sup>12</sup> However, novelists were aware of the difficulty for women in the way the marriage market worked. Maria Edgeworth echoes More in *Belinda* (1809) when she has Lord Delacour declare to Hervey:

‘Oh, Mr Hervey, you do not – you cannot know her merit, as I do. It is one thing, sir, to see a fine girl in a ball-room, and another – quite another – to

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<sup>12</sup> Helena Wells, in her preface to *Constantia Neville or the West Indian* (1800:iii-iv), makes it clear that if young women are going to benefit from novels, they must have enough romance to appeal to their readers.



live in the house with her for months, and to see her, as I have seen Belinda Portman, in everyday life, as one may call it. Then it is one can judge of the real temper, manners and character'(1809:1986:381).

He then lists all Belinda's achievements, especially in effecting a reconciliation between himself and his wife. However, Delacour is not about to marry Belinda and Hervey has not been able to watch and judge Belinda's behaviour in the same detail.

There was one area, however, where women could perhaps watch without being watched themselves and that was in a masquerade where they could wear disguise. Going to a masked ball gave women an advantage in that their disguise allowed them to break some of the rules and etiquette of society. Terry Castle referring to Bakhtin's discussion of the carnivalesque and the masquerade claims it "is always provocative: it intimates an alternative view of the 'nature of things' and embodies a liberating escape from the status quo" (Castle:1995:103). Castle argues that it allows for transgressive behaviour in both gender and class terms, and does for realist literature what the supernatural does in fantasy literature. She refers to the way "male characters may abruptly lose their authority following a masquerade, while female characters acquire unprecedented intellectual and emotional influence over them"(1995:111). I would argue that while this may be true on some occasions, it might also put women at even more risk than an ordinary ball, since transgressive behaviour usually involves taking risks in opposition to those people who have a stake in preserving the status quo. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1993), however, it may allow those without power to assume the power of their disguise and thus stake out a claim to a part of the field that is not usually theirs. Sophia Lee, in *The Life of a Lover* (1804), makes her heroine Cecilia dismiss masquerades as worthless. She is invited to Lady Sarah's masquerade because there is a spare ticket. As governess to Lady Sarah's grandchildren, she is in a difficult position. She has fallen in love with Lord Westbury, the children's father, although his wife is still alive, and meanwhile, Lord Westbury's brother, George Clifford is also interested in her. In her letter to her friend, Amelia, she writes: "you would find it hard to imagine anything much more dull than this celebrated amusement. Persons of reputation hardly ever venture to speak; and those who know one another are very few: those who know anything of the characters they represent are fewer still" (1804:Vol.1:310). Nevertheless, while Cecilia is at the masquerade, George Clifford manages to persuade her into a room on

their own and proposes. Cecilia reports to Amelia that she refused Mr Clifford but is worried in case that makes Lord Westbury think she is encouraging him to take an interest in her. In spite of the heroine's scorning the masquerade, Sophia Lee uses it to further the plot: it is unlikely George Clifford could have inveigled Cecilia into a private room without disguise since the rest of the company might have seen her entering and leaving. In fact, in this case, since Cecilia does not want Clifford's attentions, the masquerade, if anything, has further disempowered a governess in an aristocratic household.

In the same way, Helena Wells in *Constantia Neville or the West Indian Maid* (1800), does not see fit to depict the masquerade as empowering her heroine. When Constantia goes to live with the Rochfords they have a masquerade and Constantia decides to go dressed as a pilgrim, since having been brought up in the West Indies and having few friends in England, she feels she is a wanderer in a strange land. The experience perhaps allows her to meet people she might otherwise not have met but it is not particularly empowering for her. Again it is the man who uses the masquerade to impose on Constantia. She meets another pilgrim who she later discovers is Mr Rochford and he warns her about being so secretive so she changes back into her own clothes (1800: Vol.1:245-254). With or without her disguise, it does not lessen Lord Rochford's interest in her. Constantia is horrified the morning after the masquerade to see the destruction of flowers and trees in the grounds caused by fireworks and people trampling. Wells also makes it plain that many guests did not know enough about the characters they were dressed up as, although some of the characters appear again in Constantia's life. Clearly Lord Rochford is not the same kind of pilgrim as Constantia. What the masquerade has done for Constantia is to enable her to learn more about the behaviour of less civilised men. The same is true for Fanny Burney's eponymous heroine in *Cecilia* (1782).

Burney uses a masquerade as part of Cecilia's introduction to London high-life (1782: 1999:Vol.1:103-127). Again it does not so much empower Cecilia as allow Burney to make sure her heroine, and at the same time her readers, gain an insight into some of the characters she will meet without their disguises later on: the devil who is Mr Monkton and the white domino who is Delville. Since Burney loves to play with names and the plot of this novel depends on Cecilia keeping her maiden name once

she is married, there is an interesting play occurring during the masquerade. Monkton, who by his name might be considered the holy man, is later revealed as the villain or devil of the novel, and Delville, with the devil and evil in his name, is later revealed as the white hero. The masquerade, therefore, by implying that names may indicate the opposite attributes for their characters, has given readers, if not Cecilia, a hint of what is going to happen. Similarly, in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1800) the heroine attends a fancy dress ball with Lady Delacour, and this time the carnival element allows not only for dressing up but also for swapping of costumes, so that those characters who suspect they know who is behind the disguise are, in fact, duped. Lady Delacour and Belinda go as the tragic and comic muse respectively, but then swap costumes so that the men present, including Clarence Hervey, who want Lady Delacour to hear what they are gossiping about, are actually gossiping about Belinda and her match-making aunt in Belinda's presence. Hervey is certainly at a disadvantage in this masquerade, since his own costume of a serpent was destroyed by fire before the beginning of the party, and now he discovers that Belinda has heard him compare her aunt's "packaging" of her nieces on the marriage market to that of Packwood's razor strops (1800:1986:18-19). Whether Hervey's faux pas empowers Belinda is doubtful but it has certainly made her wary. Sarah Green is more determined than Burney and Edgeworth to show the unacceptability of women dressing in disguise. If anything, her heroines gain nothing through attending a masquerade but then her novel is a satire as its title makes clear. In *Romance Readers, Romance Writers* (1810), two women characters swap dresses at a masquerade. Lady Isabella who wants to elope with her lover Major Raymond plots a stratagem by arranging for the local rector to host the masquerade. At first there is some doubt about the appropriateness of this, but it is all supposed to be very harmless and some of the older generation will be onlookers not in disguise. Meanwhile, the costumes are all discussed quite openly, and it is only the last minute change-over between Lady Isabella as a pilgrim and her friend Margaret as an Arcadian shepherdess that allows Lady Isabella to give her unwanted suitor, Sir Charles Sefton, the slip. She has also persuaded Sir Charles and Major Raymond to swap (1810:Vol.2:18), the double swap confusing Sir Charles even further. The masquerade also involves two unexpected men, dressed as a German hussar and a Highland Chief, who quarrel and then become involved in a duel. The German hussar is badly wounded and taken to the home of Margaret's sister, Mary, who then discovers he is, in fact, her lover,

Harrington. This enables him eventually to marry Mary, which might not have happened without the masquerade and the duel. (1810:Vol.2:33). This masquerade results in two women achieving what they want. However, since the novel is a satire on novel-reading and writing, the message left with the reader is hardly one of feeling that women have been given a chance to do something worthwhile. It seems that Sarah Green is using the masquerade as a way of emphasising to her readers that if women behave with what she considers to be impropriety they get what they deserve. In fact, Major Raymond is not faithful to Lady Isabella and she is eventually divorced and has to retire to a cottage in the country. Margaret who aids and abets her at the masquerade is later seduced by Sir Charles Sefton, has his baby, and has to pretend to be a widow, which with her uncle's help of providing her with a cottage, she is able to do. For the heroine on this occasion, assuming the power offered by a masquerade only leads to life as a single woman in a cottage. Women authors make a far more profitable use of masquerades in the structure of their narratives than their heroines are allowed to do in their lives.

Women novelists use the depiction of public spaces where women are both spectator and spectacle to emphasise the risks that women face in these public appearances. If they are able to extend a civilising influence over men in the process, then this is welcomed. Often, however, unless closely chaperoned by female companion or husband, these appearances may be considered inappropriate behaviour. The novels highlight the dilemmas but do not offer a solution. In the next section I examine the depiction of tourism undertaken by women, where the same dilemma exists.

#### **4. The Depiction of The Picturesque and Journeys for Pleasure and Necessity**

*The Lady's Magazine* expects women to be interested in travel and to travel and write about their experiences themselves. In March 1789 the magazine prints extracts from Lady Craven's travels to Constantinople recently published. The sections are called *The Orphan in France* and *Turkish Women*. There is also a reference to her time spent in Vienna where she contradicts Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account of German stoves with the words: "Whoever wrote Lady Mary's letters, for she never wrote them herself, misrepresents things most terribly" (March 1789:151-4). In 1795 the magazine offers readers long extracts from Ann Radcliffe's accounts of her travels on the continent (July 1795:320-4 and August 1795:359-363) and again in 1796 her

travels in the Lake District (February 1796:78). There are frequent descriptions of towns and their inhabitants as well as the countryside, with a determination to keep the reports up-to-date. For example in 1796 there is an account of how Jews are badly treated in Frankfort by being enclosed in ghettos in certain parts of the town and being forced to display a piece of yellow cloth on their clothing, though the author is not given (June 1796:240). This is followed a month later by a letter pointing out inaccuracies in the article and assuring readers that the Jews do not have to wear yellow, and although there are some restrictions on their travel, they are not living in ghettos (July 1796:293-4). There are extracts from Charlotte Smith's *Rural Walks*, although these could be evidence of *The Lady's Magazine* being interested in education as much as walking in the countryside. For example, the extract called *The Fishermen* has Mrs Woodford talking to her three young charges about boats, fishing and navies, and how if no-one had navies and armies there could not be any fighting (October 1796:441). There is also discussion of cormorants and other birds and where they build their nests (October 1796:446), and *The Nightingale's Nest* has a discussion on bird-nesting and how animals depend on human beings (December 1796:446). *The Lady's Magazine* also offers its readers several extracts from Helen Maria Williams' *A Tour in Switzerland*: in March 1798 they re-print her account of life in Paris, detailing its balls, amusements, festivals, fashions. After one or two more extracts during the following months, they print Williams' description of a Swiss landscape at the Rhine falls at Schaffhausen: she describes the falls as nature with its "vast, eternal, uncontrollable grandeur" (February 1799:81). In June 1805 they print a description of Windermere from Mawman's *Excursion to the Highlands of Scotland and English Lakes* which includes the passage explaining how they "heightened our pleasure by using Claude Lorraine glasses, the mellow tint of which softened the glare" (June 1805:317-19). It is clear from these extracts that the magazine expected its readers to be interested in urban and rural landscapes, architecture, politics, and fashion.

Other extracts and articles help their readers develop their aesthetic taste. They reprint material from an essay by William Gilpin on painting and landscape where he writes that "in the perspective of a picture mountains lose their vastness. We must therefore enlarge the scale a little beyond nature, to make nature look like herself." He adds that painters must do the same with clouds (July 1789:352). Later the magazine

gives readers extracts from Gilpin's essay on *Picturesque Beauty*. He compares the different way poets and painters use the same metaphor of the sun coming through a woody scene. It will work in poetry, but not in painting, as it attracts the eye from what is more interesting. In painting, the painter needs a storm and the sunset together (September 1791: 486-8). In order to balance Gilpin's masculine view of landscape painting, they also print extracts from Elizabeth Hamilton's *On Imagination and Taste*, where she takes issue with Gilpin, for not being interested in the moral context in the development of taste which needs "a certain portion of sensibility" for enjoying whatever is beautiful or sublime (June 1802):293). This is perhaps one of the important differences between the way men and women comment on what they see in their travels, and one which I examine next, in the context of the problems it creates for women.

Many novels include examples of enjoyable and enjoyed journeys, but even in the sphere of appreciation of landscape, "female difficulties" do not entirely disappear. In the first section of this chapter I quote a passage from Gilpin, which underlines women's problems with being seen in public spaces; and because the picturesque is to be looked at in the same way as women are to be looked at, they come to be equated. Ann Bermingham (1994:81-119) explains how Uvedale Price, writing on the picturesque, compares picturesque landscape and picturesque women: "the picturesque was all surface and thus all femininity" (1994:89), just as Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) feminises the beautiful, leaving the sublime as the male sphere. Bermingham explains that a woman "cannot be both a connoisseur and the object of the connoisseurship": the best she can do is to desire "to be seen seeing" (1994:92). The best depiction of this dilemma for women is in the character of Veronica in James Plumtre's *The Lakers* (1798) where Plumtre shows that Veronica has read all the right experts and is determined to boast of her knowledge: "Give me my glasses. Where's my Gray? Oh! Claude and Poussin are nothing. By the bye, where's my Claude-Lorrain? I must throw a Gilpin tint over these magic scenes of beauty" (1798: 1994: 74). She uses exaggerated language to typify the scenery in picturesque terms: "The amphitheatrical perspective of the long landscape; the peeping points of the many-coloured crags of the headlong mountains, looking out most interestingly from the picturesque luxuriance of the bowery foliage, margining their ruggedness, and

feathering the fells" (1798:1994:Vol.3:74). Martin Andrews (1994) points out that Plumtre's play/opera was never performed, so perhaps women were never subjected to seeing themselves thus pilloried on the stage. However, the very fact that Plumtre writes like this at all is evidence for the belief that women cannot themselves appreciate the picturesque because they are the picturesque. Elizabeth Bohls has emphasised this problem pointing out that men could construct language for describing landscape because they saw themselves as outside it, while women (and the labouring classes and non-Europeans) were trapped inside the landscape (1995:67). Gilpin argues that the picturesque is not concerned with utility, and Joshua Reynolds that aesthetics must be disinterested,<sup>13</sup> but Bohls claims that women such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Dorothy Wordsworth are interested in the particular, as I argue in my first chapter, and so they rework "the three founding assumptions of modern European aesthetics: the generic perceiver, disinterested contemplation; and the autonomous aesthetic domain" (1995:204). I examine now how women write about the journeys and tourism undertaken by the heroines in their novels to discover how far they are following the example of Mary Wollstonecraft and Dorothy Wordsworth in reworking these "founding assumptions," and to what extent they are simply echoing the male approach to describing the picturesque. Some of the novels have sections or passages that seem to have been taken directly from guide or tour books, and we know that the authors were indebted to these since they never visited the regions they are describing. One of these is Anne Radcliffe who uses the landscape of Italy and Switzerland although she had never been there.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Alethea Lewis in *Disobedience* (1797) openly quotes from Gilbert Imlay's guide book to America, since she has not been to America herself. On the other hand, some of the descriptions in her English scenes are more likely to have arisen from direct experience. Charlotte Smith mostly uses the landscapes she has experienced herself, and this can be corroborated in her poetry. Elizabeth Sara Villa-Real Gooch uses places which she obviously knows well and often has her fictional characters visit, not only real places, but also real people.

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<sup>13</sup> I refer to William Gilpin and Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* in chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> Chloe Chard analyses the sources for Ann Radcliffe's descriptions of Italy in her notes to the Oxford edition of *The Romance of the Forest* (1791:1986:364-397).

I examine first Villa-Real Gooch's *Truth and Fiction* (1801).<sup>15</sup> The epistolary format gives the author a chance to write a of travelogue, since the letter form necessitates one of the correspondents being at a distance from one or more of the others. In this case Julia is on holiday with her aunt in Devon and writes to her friend Selina in Derbyshire about all the places she visits. We hear a little about how she grieves for her lost lover, Ferdinand, whom she has rejected, but we hear much more about, for instance Powderham Castle near Sidmouth. Julia tells Selina that there are "picturesque views of both land and water," but what is more interesting is that she particularises the occurrences in the castle itself. She has seen a portrait of Lord Courtenay's sisters done by Mary Cosway, and also a portrait of Louis XVI which gives her the opportunity to expiate on his death, and to refer to noblemen, suggested by Lord Courtenay's behaviour, not being what they used to be. Julia, is nevertheless, aware of improvements being undertaken at Powderham: "the plantation is superbly laid out, an infinite variety of the choicest exotics and other plants from a rare and very valuable collection," summing it up as "this lovely Arcadia super-eminently blest" (1801:34-39). Meanwhile, she takes the opportunity to comment on the benefits of the countryside, not only in Devon, but in Derbyshire: she writes to Selina:

you are, believe me, too sincere a lover of nature, long to prefer the crowded theatres, the formal Ranelagh, and loose Vauxhall, to the jocund meeting of the country wake, the rural dance, and convivial sports of the harvest home. Compare the pure and healthy village of Wirksworth and the sunburnt yet ruddy countenances of its females, with the smoaky purlieus of St James's (1801:39).

There is some sentimentalising here, since in 1801, according to local comments, Wirksworth was a lead-mining village, whose population needed over twenty public houses to cope with the thirst involved in lead-mining.<sup>16</sup> Julia admits that she is writing from the Courtenay Arms inn, listening to boats on the water and she composes a sonnet about Powderham for good measure.

Julia's next letter is from Plymouth which she calls "dirty and disgusting" although the view from the port with its warships is "a most sublime perspective" (1801:54). However, her next piece of information seems to come from a more feminine

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<sup>15</sup> I examine the structure of this epistolary novel in chapter 3, and also Villa Real Gooch's intentions of tempering fiction with truth in chapter 4 on prefaces.

<sup>16</sup> Reported personally to the writer by residents of Wirksworth.



perspective. She is invited to Government House to meet Lord and Lady Lennox, and reports that Lady Lennox helps poor soldiers, instructs the band and makes baby linen for the wives and shirts for the men (1801:54-57). She then travels to Totnes where she visits the circulating library and sees pictures in Darlington House (1801:60). We are not given the details of books and pictures but Villa Real Gooch seems determined to keep the reader aware of the activities undertaken by her heroine on her tour. The next rural description comes from another of Selina's correspondents, Theodora, who is now writing from Wales, but nevertheless cannot resist the temptation to remind Selina of Matlock where they had met earlier. Theodora tells Selina how she sat in a white alcove and watched the "torrents as they swept the vallies, and gazed in silent admiration on the High Tor which frowns in sullen majesty over the rapid and swelling stream of Derwent" (1801:123). In an earlier letter to Selina, Theodora had described a very much more individual scene of her life in Aberguilly where she has established herself in a former monastery, and has had it modernised by the steward, Mr Morgan. She gives the names of Hannah and Sarah Morris, the farmer's daughters who help her, and tells how Mr Morgan goes into Chepstow to obtain supplies for her (1801:85). Villa Real Gooch alternates the more masculine generalised comment with the more feminine details which refer to everyday needs of ordinary people. Julia's next letter tells Selina about her two weeks in Cornwall. She visits Launceston castle, overgrown with ivy and "the river winding through the valley renders this wild and charming work of nature, one of the most finished and beautiful landscapes that it is possible for the eye to discover" (1801:144). This sentence has all the implications of William Gilpin's and Uvedale Price's theories in it, since it is the "work" of nature, and a "finished" landscape as if nature was the artist creating a painting; and the ruined castle would be jagged and irritating with no domestic cottages to smooth the picturesque nature of the scene (1801:144). However, Julia allows us to share her real feelings in the next section of her letter, by describing Bodmin moor as dull,<sup>17</sup> and then she praises Truro as interesting because of the carpet manufacturies where she sees children of both sexes working on the looms. Her next stop is Marazion which she labels a "mean place" but then she describes St Michaels Mount and how, at low water, it is possible to cross and ascend "by passing between vast and immense stones which have rolled from this high rock,"

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<sup>17</sup> I wonder whether Gilpin would have seen Bodmin as picturesque.

and how they needed to rest and “throw the eye in the interim, over the vast immensity of ocean” (1801:146). She then gives details of the castle owned by Sir John St Aubyn, his improvements, and how he entertains. Her final detail is of the houses on the quay below, where pilchards are cured, and then how they return to the mainland by boat (1801:147-9). Just before Lands End they visit a mine, with a bridge under the sea, and she describes how the miners are let down in buckets. When Julia eventually returns to Yorkshire with her aunt, she still has a few more details of how they stayed in Sidmouth again on the way back. She calls it a wonderful place, set in hills, with neat houses. The town, she says, has every convenience for bathing, and people can obtain books and newspapers from Exeter, and there are many concerts and balls. Perhaps, Sidmouth’s balls are less loose than those held at Ranelagh, and the place less smoky than St James. She describes Exeter as having a “noble” cathedral with interesting monuments, but also names the organist, Mr Jackson, who is a good composer, and then quotes from Gray to describe the choir boys’ singing. Her detail on Bridport goes into the names of the flowers round the doors and windows: aloes, geraniums and myrtle trees, and hedges of honeysuckle, rose and sweet briar (1801:170). There are brief descriptions of Dorchester, Blandford and then Salisbury where she gives details of the height of the spire and the length of the cathedral, and notices a painting of the resurrection by Sir Joshua Reynolds over the communion table (1801:174). That is really the last of the guide-book/travel letters. Overall, they do more to change the three assumptions of the masculine approach, which Bohls analysed, but they also have some echoes of that approach alongside the reworking. They are much more concerned with ideas of utility than Gilpin allows for in the picturesque, and because they form part of personal letters from one woman to another, they involve the reader in the particularised relationship.

Since Julia is travelling with her aunt, she has no need to flaunt her travelling as a woman on her own, nor write about it except in letters to a friend. Quite different is the Julia in Maria Jane Jewsbury’s short story “The History of an Enthusiast” from *The Three Histories* (1830), where she has gone to London to become a writer but bemoans the fact that fame is no use to a woman (1830:130). Finally she decides to travel on her own, and then Jewsbury gives the reader the comment from society women: “Well, the reviewers will certainly leave off their compliments about her

womanliness, and so forth; absolutely, if she completes all by travelling alone, she will be a second Mary Wollstonecraft, and I suppose we shall have another version of Letters from Norway”(1830:170). Jewsbury does not give the reader any more of Julia’s history so we do not know if she writes her letters from Norway. I can only presume that Wollstonecraft is being exposed to readers and would-be women travel writers alike as an awful warning. Villa Real Gooch has managed her travel writing more skilfully by making it part of a novel where the heroine is travelling accompanied by her aunt, thus ensuring that her heroine is not associated with Wollstonecraft’s reputation. In some novels the woman traveller’s experiences are part of the narrative structure of the story: the heroine undertakes travel because she must escape from a threatening situation. In this case the account may be based on personal experience or the travel material may be extracted from guidebooks.

A heroine’s escape story is told by Alethea Lewis in *Plain Sense* (1799) when Ellen’s husband takes her on what she expects to be a holiday in Europe but the purpose of the journey is in fact to imprison her. The carriage overturns when they are apparently lost in the forest between Dresden and Prague (1799:Vol.3:3).<sup>18</sup> Eventually she escapes from the house where her husband imprisons her, helped by Theresa, one of the servants who flings the garden door open for Ellen. She has managed to be dressed as a peasant and she has a mandoline with her as a way of earning her living. There is nothing for her to do but walk and earn her keep. However, Lewis tells us that she is not fooled by a taste for the pastoral, and although she enjoys the countryside she realises a carriage would be more comfortable. She actually walks for fourteen days through Franconia and then makes for Frankfort and the Rhine. Lewis uses what Ellen sees to comment on both the picturesque and on the social scene. The castles and vineyards fill:

her mind with images of beauty perfectly new. She observed, however, the extreme inequality that a wine country produces in its inhabitants, even of the same rank; and the splendid situation in which she saw some of the peasants, did not in her eyes compensate for the sight of the many poor people with which many of the villages swarmed (1799:Vol.3:191).

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<sup>18</sup> I refer in chapter 3 to Ellen’s attempt to get a message out by sewing a letter in her baby’s clothes; and to her situation as a prisoner in chapter 5.

By co-incidence, she meets her brother-in-law who is not very helpful except in giving her some money which does not last long. She is, in fact, in very much the same position as Fanny Burney's heroine in *The Wanderer* (1814). She catches sight of her former lover, Henry, with a young woman, and presumes it is his wife, but she would find it difficult to make herself known in her present circumstances. She travels down the Rhine to Nijmegen. Lewis tries hard to accommodate her own belief in everybody working and being useful with her heroine's position as a beggar: "but Ellen could not condemn the principle that made a nation hard-hearted to beggars whose very existence depended upon the industry of all" (1799:Vol.3:204). She continues begging and partly earning her way along the canals and at last reaches England by boat, where she takes a coasting vessel to Newcastle. Once there, she is penniless and the poor laws make begging difficult. She manages to pawn her wedding ring and she sets out for Groby, her own home. She approaches the manor on foot and looks through the window where she sees Henry and the young woman she had seen him with in Germany. At this point, she collapses and Henry finds her and carries her in. As Lewis completes her story with news of Ellen's husband's death, and the young woman being Henry's sister, Ellen and Henry are free to marry. Lewis praises her heroine for the "exercise of unshaken integrity" but she has certainly pointed out "female difficulties", the subtitle of Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), at the same time, just as she does with Mary in her novel, *Disobedience* (1797). The enforced travel through Germany allows Lewis to comment not only on landscape but also on village life and communities. It also allows the heroine to develop as a strong individual, who is able to face the difficulties European society offers to women on their own. In *Disobedience* (1797), Lewis shows America to be a safe haven for her heroine, Mary, compared with the difficulties Mary suffers in England.

In *The Discarded Daughter* (1810) Alethea Lewis sets the first part of the novel in Suffolk near the village of Framlingham. Lewis describes a cottage with its view of the nearby estate, Woodbine Park, the navigable river and a town, which is Woodbridge. When, after many adventures, the two heroines, Juliet and Clara, finally return to Suffolk and are married, Lewis apostrophises Framlingham church where the marriages take place. It was of course the town she came from herself: "Framlingham church! Sacred pile! Well known, and well remembered! We mention thee with

association of pleasing ideas; and no one whose friendship we covet, will grudge us the innocent qualification. The organ in this temple was truly harmonious..."

(1810:Vol.4:210). In this way, Lewis strives to make the setting for her novel a knowable community which, as I point out in chapter 1, is an important aspect of novel structure: if her women characters travel it is because they are forced into it, but they return to the place of their birth, to the home which is a proper place for women characters. Perhaps, by 1810, Lewis had lost her enthusiasm for allowing her heroine to find a proper place to settle in America, which she describes in so much detail in *Disobedience* (1797).

However, if women novelists have a wider project, then one way to circumvent the accusation that it is improper for a woman to travel on her own, is for the woman author to use the voice of a male traveller. In a way, this partly evades the issue of the female traveller's difficulties. On the other hand, it gives women authors, and their possible travelling heroines, a freedom from the kind of censure the members of society offer to Julia in Jewsbury's short story. One of the earliest novelists to use a male narrator is Sarah Scott in *Millenium Hall* (1762). Since the places described in the novel are fictional, it also gives Scott the chance to write about an all-woman society in terms of its reception by the male narrator. It is not so much the travelling, as the society itself which becomes the focus of the novel.

This format is repeated by Sydney Owenson in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). This allows Owenson to describe Ireland in the voice of Horatio, the young English traveller: Horatio can respond to landscape from the masculine point of view, but more importantly he can learn about Irish culture with the help of Glorvina the Irish girl he falls in love with. Thus, Owenson is able to make a comparison between English and Irish landscape with reference to Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa: "And if the glowing fancy of Claude Lorraine would have dwelt enraptured on the paradisaal charms of English landscape, the superior genius of Salvator Rosa would have reposed its eagle wing amidst those scenes of mysterious sublimity, with which the wildly magnificent landscape of Ireland abounds" (1806:1999:18). Owenson gives her hero the qualities of sensibility usually associated with a female protagonist, and he realises immediately that the "rich treasures of Ceres seldom wave their golden heads over the earth's fertile bosom" in Ireland (1806:1999:19); and he understands

that is the fault of absentee landlords like his father (1806:1999:34). In an ironic twist on the enforced travel of so many heroines, this hero has been forced to travel because his father has sent him as a means of removing him from a dissipated life in England. Apart from this twist in gender, Owenson uses the opportunities afforded by a travel narrative, to make political and national comments. From the political point of view it bears some comparison with Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792)<sup>19</sup> but Horatio remains the only narrator, while Desmond's letters are interspersed with letters from other writers, male and female. Unlike Smith, Owenson claims that "politics can never be a woman's science, but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment" (cited in Campbell: 1988:61). However, with an English male narrator learning from the wild Irish girl, Glorvina, about Ireland, Owenson has managed to hide her political comments behind her comments on patriotic issues: the virulent attacks made on her book by John Wilson Croker only served to make it more popular (Campbell:1999:72).

Horatio writes of how he follows the princess Glorvina with her father into a chapel and how impressed he is with the Catholic religion. He describes it as if it is a landscape: "how seducingly it speaks to the senses; how forcibly it works on the passions; how strongly it seizes on the imagination; how interesting its forms; how graceful its ceremonies; how awful its rites. What a captivating, what a picturesque faith!" (1806:1999:50). Indeed, within a few paragraphs he is using the same kind of language for the landscape itself with its "rocks, which on every side rose to Alpine elevation, exhibiting, amidst the soft obscurity, forms savagely bold or grotesquely wild; and those finely interesting ruins which spread grandly desolate in the rear"; and after leaving "the world's busiest haunts" he feels like "the being of some other sphere newly alighted on a distant orb" (1806:1999:51). In another ironic twist to the usual story of heroines imprisoned in houses or castles, he climbs up on Glorvina's castle wall to look through the window at Glorvina, overbalances, falls and loses consciousness. When he regains consciousness, he is in bed and Glorvina is looking after him. His broken arm means that he has to stay in the castle but, once it gets better, he looks for ways of prolonging his stay, a sort of voluntary prisoner (1806:1999:76). Glorvina, as an expert harp player, has already given him his first lessons in Irish music and now he is offered the chance to help her improve her skills

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<sup>19</sup> I examine *Desmond* (1792) in chapter 3 on epistolary novels.

as an artist. Little by little, with the help of the castle priest, as well as Glorvina, Horatio learns more and more about Irish peasant life, Irish history and local customs. Eventually, they admit their love for each other (1806:199:159). At one point, he goes on a journey with the priest, which gives him the chance to see more of the countryside, especially the peasants at work. It also gives Horatio the chance to comment once again on the “picturesque beauty” all around (1806:1999:191), and to learn something about the old abbeys now in ruins, not to mention the hospitality of the independent country gentleman who is their host. As they travel north they enter the part of Ireland planted by the Scots. The priest tells him it is more advanced industrially than the south, and there is to be found “in the Northerns of this island much to admire and more to esteem; but on the heart they make little claims, and from its affections they receive but little tribute” (1806:1999:198).

Eventually Horatio, won over to Ireland’s cause, marries Glorvina. His travels have served both of them and their author, Owenson, in showing up the stereotypes of Ireland perpetuated by absentee landlords like Horatio’s father. Although there is some development in the character of Horatio as he learns about Ireland, there is little plot in this novel and it reads much more like a travel book. Owenson, in fact, has a few lines from Fazio Delli Uberti’s *Travels through Ireland in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century* as epigraph to the whole novel: “This race of men, tho’ savage they may seem,/The country too with many a mountain rough,/Yet are they sweet to him who tries and tastes them” (1806:1999:1). Owenson also gives the reader detailed footnotes to show her sources for all the information in the book. Some of these sources are by travel writers themselves, including Arthur Young’s *Philosophical Survey through Ireland* (1806:1999:16 and 195) and La Tocnay’s *Travels through Ireland* (1806:1999:26 and 189 and 191). Owenson uses these sources to extend her knowledge of Ireland which she has already gained through her own experience, but other novelists might be completely dependent on travel and history books if they have not visited the places they are writing about. Very often too, women novelists use male travel writers as their sources, as Campbell points out in the case of Owenson in her notes to *The Wild Irish Girl* (1999:253). I mention the ending of the novel, *Disobedience* (1797) by Alethea Lewis in chapter 6 on houses, but I examine this now in more detail as a parallel to *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806).

Lewis has a similar project in depicting America as the place where a good and useful life is possible, where the Indians no longer present a threat, so that the ending of her novel becomes a national tale on behalf of America. Since Lewis never went to America, she is entirely dependent on what she has heard from other people, and in particular she quotes from Gilbert Imlay's guide book (1792). Mary and William sail from Cork to Philadelphia and then go to Kentucky. Lewis tells us that Mary anticipates eagerly all that Kentucky has to offer, mentioning the beauty of the scenery, its flowers, caves, groves of red cedar, and its ponds of bitumen to be used for lamp oil, and its salt springs. Here, the reader learns of the natural resources of the area, and Lewis also writes of the stupendous bones "which have hitherto puzzled the inquiries of the most able naturalists" (1797: Vol.4: 91). She then gives a picture of the new immigrants setting out in their wagons and describes how delighted Mary is with scenes of industry and the countryside: "the high and impending banks of the Susquehanna, which gave her an idea of savage wildness, beyond any that even Wales could impress, united with the beautiful landscapes..... swelled her pleasure to transport, and left her not the power to think of any thing else (1797:Vol.4:98). They reach Pittsburgh and continue to Kentucky by water: "they embarked upon the beautiful stream of the Ohio, formed by the gentle and limpid waters of the Mohongahalo, flowing in serene majesty between its steep and lofty banks." But wherever Lewis has obtained this information, she takes care to add the useful to the beautiful by mentioning the "constant succession of flourishing settlements on the east side of the river" (1797:Vol.4:138). After five days, they land at a place called Limestone and at this point, Lewis quotes from Imlay where everything is described using superlatives: "Everything here assumed a dignity and splendor not to be seen in any other part of the world.....Flowers, full and perfect....Every gale is loaded with perfume," and the healthy air "inspires a thrill of gratitude for that elevation of station which the all-bountiful Creator has bestowed on man" (17997:Vol.4:140). In their introduction to Imlay's novel *The Emigrants* (1793:1998), Will Verhoeven and Amanda Gilroy point out that it was in Imlay's interests to use hyperbole since he may have had land rights in Kentucky and was keen to encourage settlers for his own financial reasons. He and others like him were criticised for false representations in the *British Critic* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1998:xvii). Verhoeven and Gilroy refer to more than one edition of Imlay's book, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (1792), and report how popular it was in England



(1998:xviii). Presumably, Lewis did not see or did not wish to acknowledge any criticisms in the English magazines. She had a purpose in the same way as Sydney Owenson did. Lewis and Owenson may both have used travel books written by men, but the material in the novels is re-worked in the narrative to suit their own purposes: Mary's own response to America and Glorvina's influence in changing Horatio's response to Ireland are evidence of an aesthetic which is gendered and linked to the moral and useful. In the next section I examine the novels where women novelists, whose women travellers have been forced to travel, are concerned, like Lewis, with women's need to work and contribute in a useful way to the community they find themselves in.

## 5. The Representation of Places of Work

Since most novels referring to work tend to be narratives relating to upper class women characters who are in difficult financial circumstances, the usual work is as governess or companion in another family. I analyse several examples in other chapters: Sophia Lee's *The Life of a Lover* (1804) where Cecilia is a governess with Lord Westbury, and in other families, I examine in chapter 4 on epistolary novels; in chapter 6 on houses, I refer to Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1778) where the heroine is governess and companion, and Mary Hays' *Victim of Prejudice* (1799) where the heroine finds it difficult to get work as a companion because she cannot get reliable references. In chapter 3, I examine novels where the heroine tries to earn her living by writing, most notably, *The Natural Daughter* (1799) by Mary Robinson. The most detailed accounts of a woman striving to find other work are in *The Wanderer* (1814) by Fanny Burney. Margaret Doody has analysed the different positions that Juliet, the heroine, is forced into, and on each occasion forced out of, as music teacher, embroiderer, milliner's assistant and mantua-maker's assistant, companion and finally running a haberdasher's shop with her friend, Gabriella. Doody claims: "More fully than any other writer of her time even a radical like Wollstonecraft, Burney examines the sheer drudgery involved in such labor" (1989:353). Doody praises Burney because, never having worked in these ways herself, she had to imagine what it must have been like. I have found very little in the novels I have read giving details of the workplace. Helena Wells, in *Constantia Neville or the West Indian Maid* ((1800),

telling her story of Constantia Neville, left with no money, interrupts her narrative to appeal to the reader for support for an asylum for industrious poverty which would benefit impoverished gentle women (1800:Vol.1:192). Alethea Lewis in her novels, constantly refers to usefulness, and in *Disobedience* (1797) makes Mary argue with her friend Harriet about the necessity for work. "And so, William and I are to work harder and harder to pay the taxes that are to furnish a place for you and Mr Wilmot where there is nothing to do" (1797:Vol.2:118). Lady Harriet's answer is to accuse her of talking politics. It is not that Mary does not want to work and pay taxes, she wants Harriet to do the same. When she writes to her lover, William, from her parents' house in London, she tells him, the society in which she mixes is full of idleness, while she reveres usefulness (1797:Vol.2:160). Once in America, Mary has a similar argument with another friend, Agatha, and tells her: "But as by an undue accumulation of riches, some riot, while others starve: so by a unequal distribution of labour, some sink under their burthens; while others consume by idleness" (1797: Vol.4:125). Again, Lewis quotes from Imlay on how luxuriant the soil is with the implication that she, William and their labourers may be working hard, but there is no suggestion of any drudgery (1797:Vol.4:204). By comparison, Burney makes Juliet realise how hard life is in the countryside when she stays on various farms in the New Forest area. There is no question of Juliet being swayed by the country idyll purveyed by writers who have not experienced the hardships of farming (1814:Vol.4: 700). She is aware of the contempt with which one of the farmers regards his wife and daughters: since a woman "could neither plow the field, nor mow the corn", he sees them as inferior beings (1814:Vol.4:696). This is a gender issue, but some novelists depict class issues which, nevertheless, have gender implications.

In her novel, *The Discarded Daughter* (1810), Lewis depicts the drudgery of her character, Juliet, kept in her father and stepmother's house to sew for her step-sisters. Her stepmother forces her make the pastry, and do the pickling, as well as be milliner and mantua-maker. On one occasion, Juliet has spent hours in her upstairs room stitching caps for the sisters, and when she is summoned downstairs to show the caps, Juliet's kitten pounces and tears the lace on the caps. Juliet is told she will have to pay for new lace out of the pittance they give her, and her kitten will be drowned (1810: Vol.2:40). When, at the end of the novel, Juliet marries into the local aristocracy, Lewis tells us that both Juliet and her new husband will not treat working

people in the way Juliet has been treated “for these people of quality so little merited that distinction, that they absolutely considered themselves as of the same species with mechanics; school-mistresses; and such dirty people whom it was derogatory to their rank even to remember but we have before placed this ridiculous propensity to its proper account – a cottage education” (1810: Vol.4: 244-5) Here Lewis writes in class terms rather than gender, but it is her heroines who have the difficulties, not the male characters.

In comparison, Burney’s Juliet suffers a variety of different impositions from employer after employer, and, as a woman worker in the fashion trade, she is there to be gazed at by upper class men and women alike, with obvious dangers from the male gaze. In her article on fashion and the picturesque, Ann Bermingham quotes from Walter Benjamin’s commentary on Marx’s coined phrase, “the soul of the commodity”, where Benjamin claims that this soul “would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle” (Benjamin cited in Bermingham: 1994:97). This means that women as commodities would then be looking for the hand and house that would be prepared to offer them a nestling place; but the women who make the commodities would be doubly at risk of being grabbed by any hand or house that snatched them. This is exactly how Burney depicts Juliet working at the milliners. “She found herself in a whirl of hurry bustle, loquacity, and interruptions” (1814: 1991:Vol.3:426). Customers keep changing their minds with no regard for the milliners, and “the good of a nation, the interest of society the welfare of a family could with difficulty have appeared of higher importance than the choice of a ribbon, or the set of a cap” (1814:1991:Vol.3:426). She sees too “the total absence of feeling and of equity in the dissipated and idle, for the indigent and laborious” (1814:1991: Vol.3:428). Sadly, her fellow workers are not concerned with each other’s welfare and are only interested in the soldiers stationed in the town. When local gossip reports that there is a new milliner of French origin, the shop becomes the “general rendezvous of the saunterers, male and female, of Brighthelmstone” (1814:1991: Vol.3:430). She herself becomes the centre of attention of starers, strollers, loungers and the curious. Like the women on the farm she will meet later, the working women of Brighthelmstone spend Sunday parading on the Steyne, strolling by the sea, or rambling on the Downs, with excursions to Shoreham and Devil’s Dyke. Juliet will not join in but if they are exposing themselves of their own accord, Juliet is seen as

equally available by people like Sir Jaspar Herrington, the elderly bachelor who shares her lodgings (1814:1991: Vol.3:435).<sup>20</sup> The working woman of whatever class is at the mercy of the men around her, and upper class women often take on a masculine role with regard to working women. For Juliet, the treatment she receives from Mrs Ireton when she is working as a companion, is in some ways as bad or worse than that she receives from the men. When Juliet befriends the young housemaid who does not understand her mistress's commands which are full of irony, all she hears in recompense is more irony:

‘O, they are not clear, I suppose? They are too abstruse, I imagine?’ contemptuously replied Mrs Ireton. ‘And you, who are kind enough to offer yourself for my companion; who think yourself sufficiently accomplished to amuse, perhaps instruct me, - you also, have not the wit to find out, what a little chit of an ordinary girl can do better with her hands, than to stand still, pulling her own fingers?’ (1814:1991:Vol.3: 483).

Mrs Ireton would no doubt treat men in her employment with similar irony but women experiencing this treatment are in a much more difficult situation.

Thus, it is unlikely that women can extend their control of a Bourdieu-type field (1993), since not all women have the same interests. Nor can working women hope to take part in that civilised society which is supposedly building up the public sphere. Both title and subtitle of Burney's novel, *The Wanderer or Female Difficulties* (1814), could, in fact, replace the title of almost all the novels I have looked at in this project. Women characters are wanderers and suffer difficulties in society because of their sex. Women novelists represent public spaces as places where their heroines are at risk of becoming the spectacle themselves, which immediately gives men an excuse for treating them, possibly with some admiration, but not with respect or esteem.

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<sup>20</sup> I refer to the way in which he both encircles her and helps her to escape from the control of the male circle at the end of the novel in section 2 of this chapter.

## Conclusion

### 1. The Space of the Novel

The novel provided a space for women to write and be published. This was true not only for a few women with social status, but for a wide range of women with different social backgrounds and different intentions. But whatever their provenance or purposes, writing and publishing a novel gave them entry to the public sphere, since their words could be read by other private people and thus they became a means of bringing those private people together. The circulating libraries played a significant part in allowing their novels to reach a widespread audience. Nevertheless, women had to fight for that space, in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of staking a claim to cultural capital, since male-dominated society, public and private, while accepting that they might be readers, was much less sure about their becoming writers.

Since novels, in this period, dealt largely with questions of love, marriage and the consequent transfer of property, together with the birth of possible heirs to that property, they were crucial documents for reflecting and/or recommending change in social behaviour. As long as daughters and wives were not in control of their own property or choice of marriage partner, nor allowed to take part in making laws, the novel was a space where daughters and wives could comment on these matters. They could invent heroines who reflected their own lives, or the lives of women they saw around them; or they could invent heroines who would subvert the principles on which those lives were predicated, with suggestions for possible changes. Mostly, the novels were able to mediate and represent elements of women's lives, reflecting or even exaggerating the wrongs of women, but were less explicit when it came to suggesting alternative behaviours or change. This is where the theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1977 and 1993) offer an explanation for what women were able to achieve in their novels: they could describe the situation in the field which represented their lives, but it was more difficult for them to try and alter that field, or establish a field where they might have more control. The novels they wrote constituted the field where they had most control. Novels, in David Harvey's terms, offered "cartographies of resistance" (1993); or in Nancy Fraser's terminology, they represented and voiced female "subaltern counterpublics" (1993); where, for example, Mary Robinson was

able to make a plea on behalf of the “aristocracy of genius” (1997); or Mary Hays to make a case against the “magic circle”.

However, much as they might claim, as Alethea Lewis did in *The Microcosm* (1800), that they were sovereigns in their own province, they knew well that if the novel was their metaphorical province, it was nevertheless subject to the laws of the actual kingdom ruled by men. Writing novels was not going to change the way property was inherited and therefore the pressure put on women (and men) to conform to parental choice in marriage partners, would remain. Nevertheless, women novelists represented the unhappiness produced by the pressures of male-dominated society. They appealed to parents to think about what they were demanding, as, for example, Alethea Lewis did in *Disobedience* (1797); or in the case of a woman left without parental protection, the woman novelist could point to the damage inflicted on women by male society, as Mary Hays did in *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1797) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) with her coinage of the term “magic circle” by which men exercised their power. Women novelists and their heroines were caught in the dual demands of the social morality by which men controlled them: they had to act with propriety in the interests of property. In particular, they had to act with propriety in their writing, or they might be admired as writers, but lose esteem as women. This is why they ensured that their heroines who were writers stopped writing after marriage: women novelists risked more in their own lives than they dared to let their heroines risk. By restricting their heroines, they gave themselves the opportunity to write and be published with at least some critical acclaim, although I would argue that this restriction was, in fact, a form of self-censorship. Alternatively, they could be accused of “clanking their chains”, the accusation referred to in the advertisement to Sydney Owenson’s novel, *Florence McCarthy* (1819): an interesting figure of speech since it implied they were indeed in chains.

However the restrictions placed on their heroines are interpreted, it is clear that women novelists found ways of circumventing the restrictions that were placed on them as writers. If their heroines were not to become novelists themselves, they could be letter-writers. The epistolary novel allowed novelists and heroines to write in an acceptable way, since letter-writing had long been considered suitable for women. Charlotte Smith was able to manipulate the technique in *Desmond* (1793) by writing

in the voice of both male and female characters. Sophia Lee did the same in *The Life of a Lover* (1804). Letters within first person narratives were used by Mary Hays in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1797), and by Helena Wells in *The Stepmother* (1799). An alternative twist to strengthening the force of the narrative was to make the first person narrator or letter-writer a man, as Sydney Owenson did in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). This became doubly empowering for the woman as author, since the narrator was the naïve male traveller who had to be initiated into Irish ways by meeting a forceful female character. The very fact that letters had a fictional author in the person of one of the characters, whose existence was often seen to be beyond the control of the author of the novel, meant that letters had the possibility of wielding extended power over readers.

Where, nevertheless, women novelists felt the voice of their characters inadequate, they asserted their rights as novelists in prefaces and in interventions in the text. The necessity of this assertion could be seen as arising out of their own insecurity as writers, but in view of the constant criticism of women as writers, it is not surprising that they felt they needed to defend themselves. The interventions gave them, too, a space to address issues that might not only be relevant to the narrative, but might also take them beyond those issues into areas of the public sphere where they were not formally admitted as contributors and participators. They were able to comment on issues such as slavery, the impact of the French Revolution, and questions of war and peace, as for example, Alethea Lewis and Charlotte Smith did. Thus, the novel afforded them a space, apparently in the domestic sphere, where they could voice their opinions and therefore at the same time participate in the development of the public sphere.

Circulating libraries were recognised by all women novelists as indispensable concomitants to the publication of, and to the establishment of a readership for their novels. That is why nearly every novel examined here had some reference to a circulating library and to the importance of books in the life of the heroine. However, like the novel itself, these libraries were continually being castigated by male critics in real life, and therefore women novelists sometimes found themselves repeating the allegations made by men. Nevertheless, because books were a basic resource for women's education and entertainment in their homes, there was frequent defence of

the circulating library along with the novel itself. The thinking heroine was a reading heroine; and the lonely heroine, and the one who eventually found a companionable husband, was likely to be a reader, too. Readers were expected to understand references to Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), to Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), to Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), and to many other novels. Equally, they were expected to know about Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *A Short Residence in Sweden and Norway* (1795) and Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). There was a difference of opinion among women novelists about which kind of reading might be more educational or more harmful, but at least knowledge about both kinds of books was taken for granted. Walsingham's defence of the circulating library in Mary Robinson's novel, *Walsingham* (1797), depended on the library offering books and newspapers of every kind to all classes of people in society. The circulating libraries were a link in the chain that brought novels with their range of public and domestic interests, from the public sphere outside the house, back into the domestic sphere of the home, and therefore were a site where women could participate in the public sphere.

## **2. Spaces within the novel**

The space of the novel and spaces within the novel are closely linked through the idea of property and marriage. If the novel offered women novelists a space for entering the public sphere, it was mostly in order to comment on conditions in the private/domestic sphere as they experienced it. The space of the house was a basic space in novels since the house was part of the property with which men were concerned in choosing their marriage partners; it was where the heir to the house would be born and brought up; and at the same time the place where women might obtain their own education, and then possibly assume some control over the household once they were married. However, as long as they were wives, they could not own the house and could be treated badly or ejected from the house, if that suited their husbands. Thus, many women novelists used the occurrences in the houses where their heroines lived, as both daughters and wives, as a way of commenting on the position of women in society. They might hope for a companionate marriage for their heroines, but often wrote about marriages where the women had nothing in common with their partners, and were badly treated, particularly in Gothic-style



story in despair from prison. Meanwhile, Wollstonecraft herself allowed her heroine in *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) to be defeated by the arguments of the judge as he defended the powers of her cruel husband. I would argue that Hays and Wollstonecraft, while seeming in some ways more defeatist, were perhaps more realistic. Lewis and Wells, on the other hand, used their Christian beliefs to construct endings for their novels where the characters were happier than was likely to be the case in real life. It could also be argued that the later novels of those women novelists who had hoped for changes as a result of the French Revolution, and who were subsequently disappointed by the Reign of Terror and the way women continued to be treated in both France and England, revealed a more despairing philosophy: the change from optimism to despair is particularly apparent in the novels of Charlotte Smith, especially if *Desmond* (1792) is compared with *The Banished Man* (1794) or *The Young Philosopher* (1798). On the other hand, women novelists like Alethea Lewis and Helena Wells, who had not invested as much in the French Revolution, found their religion strong enough to sustain a belief in the gradual amelioration of women's conditions without resort to "the pernicious tendency of modern philosophy," as Wells put it in the preface to *The Stepmother* (1799:v). Nevertheless, even Alethea Lewis decided that the only hope for a useful life for her characters, Mary and William, in *Disobedience* (1797) was in America, a destiny similar to Charlotte Smith's more revolutionary family in *The Young Philosopher* (1798), who also emigrated to America. Novelists, such as Lewis, regarded America as a country of freedom, untainted by the ways of the French, whose indulgence in luxury during the Ancien Regime, and in terror during the Revolution, not to mention their unfortunate belief in Catholicism, remained problematic areas for many women novelists. Radical women were quick to welcome the Revolution and found it harder to adjust their politics to the Terror. The less radical, however, did not want to find their condemnation of the Revolution leading them back to support for the Ancien Regime, Marie Antoinette, and the Catholic religion: a difficult situation faced by Sophia Lee when she decided to publish her novel, *The Life of a Lover*, in 1804.

If their heroines were to remain in England and successfully negotiate the spaces and places they found themselves in, women novelists needed to find some positive recommendations. Fanny Burney's suggestions made at the end of *The Wanderer* (1814), lay somewhere between the radicalism of Wollstonecraft, Hays and Smith and

the Christianity of Lewis and Wells. She writes, at the end of the novel, that the kind of difficulties faced by her heroine could be overcome “where mental courage, operating through patience, prudence, and principle, supply physical force, combat disappointment and keep the untamed spirits superiour to failure, and ever alive to hope” (1814:1991:873). That seems to imply that the solution to women’s difficulties lay in their personal endurance rather than social or political reform. I would argue that all these novelists succeeded in analysing the difficulties of their heroines; but it would take more than a novel to bring the reforms that would change society so that the next generation might not have to face those difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

I would argue that women writers, in using the novel to highlight the difficulties of women, were accumulating their own cultural capital. They could not contribute directly to the male public sphere because critics, like William Hazlitt, for example, could not understand they might have valid experiences that gave them the right to contribute. However, the critical attacks on novels like *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) show that male critics realised only too well how Sydney Owenson was making use of the novel for both patriotic, and by implication, political purposes. The many references to Wollstonecraft in novels by less well-known women novelists, and these were usually critical references, show that the women’s republic of letters was not homogeneous in its outlook. A number of women novelists were using an attack on Wollstonecraft’s life and often on her views as well, in order to defend themselves as writers. However, such a strategy became self-defeating. The very fact that after 1811 the space of the novel was gradually re-occupied by Sir Walter Scott and other male writers is indicative of how men recognised and resisted the power wielded by women in writing their novels.

I would argue that the radical principles of the French Revolution and the consequent backlash in its aftermath, both in France and England, gave some women novelists the opportunity to hope for changes in society, but at the same time, gave others a chance

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<sup>1</sup> Even Charles Dickens, writing a half century later than these women, would have success with his novels depicting what was wrong with Victorian society, but his recommendations for change were based once again on nothing stronger than an appeal to Christian virtues. At the same time, novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, or *Aurora Leigh* (1857) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, only managed to offer an “equal” role to their heroines on marriage, by having their marriage partners blinded in a fire.

to voice their fears. It was these voices finally that lost women the cultural capital they had begun to accumulate.

#### **4. Implications for Further Research**

The range of viewpoints I have found in novels by women is proof that women writers did not all respond to the society in which they lived in the same way. Their references to each other's work means, however, that they were well aware of what strategies were being adopted by their fellow writers. The existence of resources such as the Corvey Archive and the Chawton House Library now provides opportunities to chart the range in more detail, from conservative writers like Mrs Foster, to the middle-of-the-road writers like Alethea Lewis, through to radical writers like Wollstonecraft and Hays at the other end of the spectrum. Further research may well provide more examples of the middle-of-the-road writers who were able to use the novel to voice their concerns about the novel itself and the role of women in society - women writers prepared to show their indignation within a Christian, acceptable framework, without drawing down the opprobrium offered to writers like Wollstonecraft.

We have to be prepared to read novels with the understanding that the representation of space is gendered. The "situatedness," "embeddedness" and "militant particularism" of novels provided women with the opportunity of subverting a masculine, so-called universal approach. The existence of so many novels by women is itself an indication of how many women seized the opportunity afforded by the space of the novel. We have to realise that these very particular, situated qualities of the novel mean that not all women wrote in the same way: to expand Harvey's description of novels as "cartographies of resistance" (1993), we might say that women novelists were all cartographers but they were drawing their own individual maps in order to chart their resistance to a male-dominated society.

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## Appendix



Plate 1

Jacques Louis David The Oath of the Horatii 1784

The Louvre: Paris





Plate 2

Nameless and Friendless Emily Mary Osborn 1857

Private Collection



Plate 3

The Royal Academicians Johann Zoffany 1771-2

Royal Collection: London





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Plate 4

Mr and Mrs Andrews Thomas Gainsborough 1750

The National Gallery London





Plate 5

J. M Turner The Field of Waterloo 1818

Tate Gallery: London



Plate 6

Jacques-Louis David The Death of Marat 1793

The Louvre: Paris



Plate 7

Thomas Rowlandson The Exhibition Stare Case c.1800

University College Art Collections: London



Plate 8

Mary Cassatt Woman in Black at the Opera

Museum of Fine Arts: Boston

WE infer the following as we received it from an anonymous correspondent; we approve of it in general, but are not to be considered as responsible for every particular estimate.

# SCALE of FEMALE LITERARY MERIT.

PERFECTION TWENTY.

				Sentiment.	Imagery.	Animation.	Strength.	Harmony.	Feeling.	Originality.
Mrs. Cowley,	—	—	—	17	18	20	19	13	14	17
Mrs. Robinson,		—	—	20	20	17	18	20	20	20
Mrs. Barbauld,	—	—	—	10	10	9	19	10	6	12
Miss H. M. Williams,		—	—	17	19	20	17	18	17	9
Mrs. C. Smith,	—	—	—	20	17	14	10	19	20	14
Miss More,	—	—	—	9	1	2	8	2	1	0
Mrs. Carter,	—	—	—	0	0	20	20	14	10	1
Late lady Craven,		—	—	9	1	1	0	0	0	0
Miss Burney,	—	—	—	14	19	20	19	1	2	20
Miss Lee,	—	—	—	19	1	2	7	0	20	20
Clara Reeve,	—	—	—	14	1	15	11	1	10	10
Mrs. Inchbald,	—	—	—	11	12	17	13	1	12	20
Mrs. Yearley,		—	—	10	2	3	11	3	4	11
Miss Seward,	—	—	—	10	11	7	17	2	1	6

Figure 1

Scale of Female Literary Merit

*The Lady's Magazine* June 1792