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# Liberalism and Eighteenth-Century Fiction: A Socialist Feminist Inquiry

by

Rhoda J. Zuk

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Liberalism and Eighteenth-Century Fiction: A Socialist Feminist Inquiry submitted by Rhoda J. Zuk in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

R. J. Merrett
Supervisor

External Examiner

Date October 2, 1987

For my grandmothers

Western Canadian homesteaders

Florence Eliza (1898-1986)

Magdalena Katrina (1901- )

**Abstract**

The project of socialist feminism is to challenge beliefs about the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge which shape our culture's understanding of women's social relations. This thesis attempts to contribute to a discourse which seeks to reconstruct, from a socialist feminist standpoint, the conceptualization of literature and its history; it attempts to destabilize fixed, naturalized meaning systems around lines of hierarchical differentiation in texts by pointing up the constructedness, the means of legitimization, of systems of meaning. A study of English fiction, 1720-1820, can set about demystifying women's social reality by attending to the social construction of gender, and class, as it is presented in literary texts. Socialist feminist scholars affirm the critical commonplace that letters of the time respond to Lockean contentions about cognition, epistemology, and conduct, but concede that Locke's notions concerning uniformly apportioned rationality and hierarchically determined place, of democracy within tyranny, result in a systemic obfuscation of women's oppression. In all of Defoe's Moll Flanders, Richardson's Pamela, Johnson's Rasselas, Wollstonecraft's Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, and Austen's Pride and Prejudice, the feminine protagonists are accommodated to their lesser rights in what amounts to a paradigm of limited feminine autonomy. An ideology which confers upon men rights to property and therefore to power is thereby sustained.

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## Table of Contents

## I. Introduction

"It is high time to suggest that vulgar sexism is NOT the worst kind."[1]

Louise Marcil-Lacoste
"Hume's method in moral reasoning."

Pauline Bart asserts that feminist scholarship should position itself as "the academic arm of the women's movement rather than the women's arm of the academic movement."[2] Feminist work within the academy should have as its end women's liberation, and freedom can be attained only through social, collective action. Socialist feminism undertakes, as Alison Jaggar explains it,

> to interpret the historical materialist method of traditional Marxism so that it applies to the issues made visible by radical feminists...it uses a feminist version of the Marxist method to provide feminist answers to feminist questions.[3]

Further, socialist feminism contends that "capitalism, male dominance, racism and imperialism are intertwined so inextricably that they are inseparable; consequently, the abolition of any of these systems of domination requires the end of all of them."[4] Certainly feminist critiques of social and political institutions have uncovered the biases and elitism of prevailing modes of conceptualization; it is the

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[1]Louise Marcil-Lacoste, "Hume's method in moral reasoning," in The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche, ed. Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) 70.
[2]Pauline Bart, "Unexceptional Violence," The Women's Review of Books, IV, No. iii (December 1986): 12.
[3]Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1983) 124.
[4]Jaggar 124.

task of feminists to resist and defy damaging ontological and epistemological assumptions, and to replace them. Jaggar sums up the broad resolve of the socialist feminist platform:

> the epistemological superiority of women's standpoint will be demonstrated conclusively only through a distinctly feminist reconstruction of reality in which women's interests are not subordinated to those of men. This reconstruction must be practical as well as theoretical.[5]

On this analysis, literary criticism should be a form of political activism. The politicization of literary criticism by feminism in general and socialist feminism in particular requires that texts be not merely cogently glossed, but interrogated:

> The "text," whether taken as a member of the canon that displaces unacknowledged texts, as an interpretation that selectively filters a narrative, or as the sediment of history, must be questioned.[6]

Laurie A. Finke, decrying any narrow terms of reference for the feminist critic, suggests the urgency of informed political consciousness:

> Under the rubric of pluralism, feminism can do just about anything--or nothing. The formalist approach... is, in terms of the political agenda which created feminist thought, a dead end. It assumes that literature can exist in an ahistorical realm...without some sort of theoretical base, feminist criticism is likely to drift without a sense of historical, or polemical, purpose.[7]

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[5] Jaggar 371.
[6] Margaret R. Higonnet, "Introduction," in The Representation of Women in Fiction: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1981, no. 7, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983) xiv.
[7] Laurie A. Finke, "The Ideologies of Feminism," Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation 27, No. 3 (Fall 1986): 292.

To accomplish women's advancement, socialist feminists in the exercise of their critical inquiry must be careful not to succumb to academic expansionism, which seeks to "broaden" or to "enhance" itself by colonizing yet another perspective derived from an interesting or timely social-political force. The project of socialist feminism is to challenge beliefs about the origin, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge which shape our culture's understanding of women's social life. This thesis therefore attempts to destabilize fixed, naturalized meaning systems around lines of hierarchical differentiation in texts by pointing up the constructedness, the means of legitimization, of systems of meaning.

A study of some English fiction, 1720-1820, can set about demystifying women's social reality by attending to the social construction of gender, and class, as it is presented in some literary texts. An examination of various fictions of this period affirms the critical commonplace that letters of the time respond to Lockean notions about cognition and epistemology. (Eric Rothstein quips that "to ask if eighteenth-century works might well have concerned themselves with epistemology is a bit like asking if medieval ones have had a splash of theology."[1]) A number of socialist and socialist-feminist scholars, assuming that nothing is outside ideology, have undertaken to explain the

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[1]Eric Rothstein, Systems of Order and Inquiry in Later Eighteenth-Century Fiction (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1975) 245.

peculiar institutionalization of Locke's thought by English and American culture by analyzing Locke's philosophy and political theory as representative of a precisely situated class, or class-gender, stance. These philosophers regard Locke's writings as significant, because a watershed, in the history of English ideology.

Neal Wood in The Politics of Locke's Philosophy: A Social Study of 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,' insists that Locke's Essay is a social document, a cultural expression of the age. He makes a case for the vital connection between classical liberal thought and bourgeois social organization:

> in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the attitudes and values of British and North American bourgeois, whose numbers had swollen because of far-reaching economic changes, probably directly or indirectly owed more to the formative notions of the Essay than to any other book.'

Wood addresses Locke's contradictory assertions about the existence of a uniform possession of innate capability--"All men [sic] are born with basically equal rational potential"'°--and the perception of a world divided "between a small minority, the 'wise and virtuous,' the 'rational and thinking part,' the 'quicker-sighted,'" and "the 'greatest part,' the 'credulous multitude' who 'cannot know, and therefore must believe.'"'' This discrepancy between the tenets of abstract individualism and the operation of

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'Neal Wood, The Politics of Locke's Philosophy: A Social Study of "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1983) 1.
'°Wood 116.
''Wood 115.

imposed social hierarchy results in what Wood defines as a philosophy of "differential rationality."[12] Wood explains that Locke describes rationality first in the moral sense, according to which people

> are equal in rationality no matter how humble or exalted their respective social positions may be, provided that they obey the precepts of God in the form of the divine and natural law and conscientiously dedicate themselves to the pursuit of their calling.'[13]

He also describes rationality in "the naturalistic sense" of "an individual's analytic ability, his [sic] acuity and lucidity of understanding, and his [sic] depth and breadth of knowledge."[14] However, although human beings are to be judged according to their mental capacities, the cultivation and testing of moral intelligence occurs only within the circumstances of designated privilege:

> The foundation of differential rationality, therefore, was the property differential, with all the advantages of wealth and power set against the disadvantages of poverty and powerlessness.'[15]

Only men, of the educated/propertied classes, can become fully human.

Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange observe that "many political theories have an ontology which is male"[16]; Clark remarks that "they would be vastly different theories if

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[12]Wood 116.
[13]Wood 115.
[14]Wood 115.
[15]Wood 116.
[16]Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange, "Introduction," in The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche, ed. Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) ix.

these assumptions were not made."[17] Socialist feminists, who address directly Locke's political theory, formulated primarily in Two Treatises of Government,[18] go further than Wood in locating the exclusion of women, as well as labouring men, from political-philosophical life as the basis of social relations which empower men of property or prospects. Locke concedes in Two Treatises women's rationality and abstract equality within marriage in order to ground his "assault on the patriarchal vision"[19] of polity which is paradigmatically articulated by Robert Filmer:[20] Locke denies the divine right of kings by modifying the definition of the husband/father's rights within the family. But there are reasons beyond those of formal debate to justify a shift in thinking about women. Zillah R. Eisenstein in her chapter "John Locke: Patriarchal Antipatriarchalism" believes that Locke distinguishes between "The politics of the family and the politics of the state" in part because in seventeenth-century England "the home becomes distinguished from the market and the family from the state."[21] She maintains that the "market does not

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[17]Lorenne M. G. Clark, "Women and Locke: Who owns the apples in the Garden of Eden?" in The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche, ed. Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) 16.

[18]John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (2nd ed., Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1970).

[19]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Property and Patriarchy in Classical Bourgeois Political Theory," Radical History Review 4 (1977): 55.

[20]Sir Robert Filmer, Patriarchia and Other Political Works, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford, 1949).

[21]Zillah R. Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal

displace the patriarchal family in terms of the liberal notion of politics, but in actuality merely redefines it."[22] There arises in Locke's time, that is, a need to reconceptualize women within patriarchy. Eisenstein notes that the

> vision of subjugated woman is rearticulated in the domestic literature of the seventeenth century to accommodate the changing relations of the economy. The home was beginning to be differentiated from the market, and woman's subjugation would have to be rewired in terms of this.[23]

Locke's notions of uniformly apportioned rationality and hierarchically determined place, of democracy within tyranny, result in a systemic obfuscation of women's oppression. Their "education," unlike that of men,

> will find its expression within the home politically organized by liberalized patriarchal values, which in actuality exclude women from the "rational" life by virtue that they are women. This develops into the mystifying anomaly that woman, as a mother within the family, exists separate and apart from political life. Men are freed from familial patriarchal rule; women are relegated to it.[24]

Patriarchy, excised from civil life, is retained within the domestic situation.

Clark argues that the basis of feminine subjugation within Lockean liberalism lies in the conceptualization of propertied men as rational, atomistic individuals, and of women-like poor men--as a class. Locke assumes that the family and its structure of authority are a natural

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[21](cont'd) Feminism (New York: Longman, Inc., 1981) 33.
[22]Eisenstein 49.
[23]Eisenstein 35.
[24]Eisenstein 48.

association created in a state of nature.[25] The ideological split between male and female, individual and class, public and private, enforces a split in the universe of practice. Women are reduced to the realm of nature to ensure the manifest destiny of the male. Locke's "theory had two major objectives, the legitimizing of inequality in the distribution of property between one man and another (or, more accurately, as between one family and another), and the legitimizing of an exclusive male right to control and dispose of the familial property."[26] The effect on women, as well as on poor men, is disenabling:

> in so far as the peace, safety, and public good of the people consists in protecting the private property of individual men, the ownership of the means and products of reproduction is as necessary for this end as is protected ownership of the means and products of productive labour...women's unique capacities with respect to reproduction must be transformed into economic and social disadvantages in order to ensure that they will be forced into a position of dependence on men. Thus a system of private property owned and controlled by males necessitates transforming a mere biological difference into an economic and social disadvantage in order to ensure the continuation of that system.[27]

Women are for all practical purposes put into a position where they may be exploited with ease; but Locke's lofty notion of the moral, rational, pre-social individual is problematic to the inheritors of Locke's inconsistent analysis. Eisenstein refers to the philosophical crisis instigated by Locke's reformulation of women's role:

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[25]Clark 20.
[26]Clark 35.
[27]Clark 36.

> It is important to note that Locke opens up the conception of individuality for women as well as men, even if he does not follow through on this potentiality. In Locke's defense of the new individual--independent, free, and rational--he provides a political language that can be applied to all equally. The ideology sets forth a commitment to all alike. The promise of this potential freedom in liberal ideology may be denied by the political realities of society, but it still stands as a model on which later feminists can call.[28]

Locke's writing teasingly, tantalizingly "promises an equality that in actuality is impossible."[29]

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese also elucidates the irresolvable contradiction between the idea of the autonomous individual and the idealization of womanhood which emerges from Locke's desire to free citizenry from a restrictive political organization while maintaining the rule of the propertied male class over women:

> Locke actually bequeathed to women a far more radical legacy than his promptly-qualified assertion of their equality within the family. His psychology, with its emphasis on the rational attributes of the human mind and the decisive role of the sense impressions in the development of thought, potentially offered women the same possibilities for personal development as men. And with Reason, by Locke's own admission, as the bond of the public sphere, no innate characteristics should have denied women's equal access to it.[30]

But no amount of education or reasonable morality can liberate any individual woman from her ascribed feminine status:

> The theoretical equality of women necessary to the liberty and to the hegemony of bourgeois male individuals rapidly foundered on the economical and

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[28]Eisenstein 43-44.
[29]Eisenstein 34.
[30]Fox-Genovese 51-52.

> psychological arrangements necessary to the survival and class dominance of those same male bourgeois individuals.[31]

The fissures in Locke's political model create confusion and even dissension among the later bourgeoisie; literary discourse contends with the philosophical ambiguity of women's worth and legitimate purview. In fiction, heroines are accommodated to their lesser rights in what amounts to a paradigm of limited feminine autonomy. An ideology which confers upon men rights to property and therefore to power is thereby sustained. Since property, in the Lockean view, is the source both of freedom and personality,[32] ladies are socially, politically, economically, and psychically disadvantaged. But the illusion of the sexual symmetry in "separate spheres"--public and private--justifies the patriarchal economic system and perpetuates its benefits to bourgeois men; what is a patently false description of women's experience is an ideologically true proposition about women's situation.

The eighteenth-century liberal theories of knowledge which emanate from Locke propound that moral understanding and human nature are changeless; philosophic emphasis is not to be placed on the so-called "accidental" differences between individuals of time, class, sex, or race. Kenneth MacLean remarks that these epistemological conceptualizations reflect and create an impetus towards a society in eighteenth-century England "in which democracy

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[31]Fox-Genovese 51.
[32]Eisenstein 44.

seemed desirable" and in which "truth was a matter of suffrage."[33] The basis of society is toleration and contractual understanding. Certainly, eighteenth-century writings reveal a belief that consensus in moral and aesthetic matters is possible; literature has a consciously public function, and addresses itself to women as well as men. However, while liberal theories of knowledge might in abstract conclude or imply that human nature has no gender, and while the moral and intellectual scope for women writers, readers, and fictional characters increases, it is not true that moral and psychological relationships depicted in the writings of the eighteenth-century are nonsexual. This is not surprising, given Locke's contention that the crucial basis of knowledge is experience. The integrity and specificity of women's point of view is obscured by the conflict between the notion of an "objective" human reason and the fact that gender roles are ascribed and constructed. Women--or rather, "ladies"--are acknowledged as important participants in English cultural life, and yet are placed outside much of the male experience: women are of, and yet not of, normative (that is, male) existence. This exploitative paradox of feminine being has been noted often; to cite it is merely descriptive. I am interested in the literary, rhetorical strategies which authorize the paradox. Textual unity may be aesthetically pleasing and may elegantly enact moral instruction; it may also enclose women

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[33]Kenneth MacLean, John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale UP, 1936) 152.

within an untenable universe.

The texts discussed in the following chapters are part of the recognized canon of the academic syllabus, with the possible exception of Mary Wollstonecraft's fictions, which have, however, been the subject of considerable attention recently; the point is that the literature and its contexts here under consideration are highly accessible. The socialist feminist inquiry must be directed towards literature to which everyone attends, as well as to those texts historically excluded from scholarly considerations, which, though recovered by gynocriticism, are still marginalized. Margaret R. Higonnet emphasizes that "Retrieval is meaningless unless it is accompanied by revision of our ordering and interpretive processes."[34] It is necessary to the alteration of critical discourse that liberal, misogynist dimensions of texts, 1720-1820, be interrogated. Each of Defoe's Moll Flanders (1722), Richardson's Pamela (1740), Johnson's Rasselas (1757), Wollstonecraft's Mary (1788), and The Wrongs of Woman (1798), and Austen's Pride and Prejudice (1813), despite the gender, class, and precise historical situation of the authors, sustains by rearticulating the aptness of sexual hierarchy. The writers perceive themselves as contributing to a public discourse which manifests and advocates urgent and universal principles; the oppressive power of bourgeois men is valorized, mythologized, and normalized through the

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[34]Higonnet xvi.

institutionalization of literature which occurs as English writers self-consciously seek to uphold and advance common cultural tenets about women. Much scholarship of the later eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century emphasizes the importance of the French Revolution to the institutionalization of literature which accompanies that of the consolidation of British bourgeois class interests including the salient division of society along the lines of gender. But the authoritative form which literature, class and gender take at this stage has gained momentum from the literary discourse derived from classical liberalism. The characteristic liberal tension between the debunking of theory and the advocacy of a strict yet self-imposed regulation of social relations, so often regarded as toleration in civil life, and the gaining of the middle way in the moral and rhetorical tendency of literature, is typical of all these texts.

In my own writing I have tried to maintain a sense of balance and antithesis which may seem parodic of the very style of ideological thinking being interrogated here. Derrida comments on the irony of the deconstructive effort:

> We cannot utter a single deconstructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[35]

Gayle Rubin, in her feminist, cultural anthropological

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[35]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in The Structuralist Controversy, ed. R. Macksey and E. Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972) 250.

synthesis of Freud, Marx, and Lévi-Strauss in "The Traffic in Women," agrees that "what slips in is formidable."[36] Fox-Genovese draws attention to the historical as well as the linguistic complexities of the dialectical process:

> Theorists draw upon previous intellectual traditions and even think in inherited vocabularies. To the extent that their own experience differs from that of their predecessors, they may inform the words with new content, but rarely even in their most radical departures do they effect a complete rupture with previous problematics and discourses. In this sense, theory simultaneously abstracts from the current experience (cultural, religious, psychological, as well as social, political, and economic) which it attempts to describe according to plausible constructs, and engages previous theories, which it purports to answer in logical (or normative) as well as experiential terms. Any given theory thus adheres to at least two discrete systems: the intellectual tradition to which it is heir, and the contemporaneous society some or more facets of which it attempts to articulate.[37]

The student of literature is situated between, on the one hand, an intellectual affinity with texts, acquired at least in part through institutional training, and on the other hand, an evaluative ideology derived from cultural beliefs which bring into prominence class and women's interests. So it seems that the following chapters, in their attempt to concede to scholarly method while undermining the ideology of prevalent assumptions about women and literature, are marked, in style and content, by a willingness to be unfixed. This thesis attempts to contribute, that is, to a non-logocentric discourse, one which seeks to reconstruct,

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[36]Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," in Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review P, 1975) 200.
[37]Fox-Genovese 54.

from a socialist feminist standpoint, the understanding of literature and its history.

It is the contention of socialist feminism that feminist reforms are impossible without a radical restructuring of society. Until views of reality are changed by knowledge of the standpoint of oppressed women and classes, social reality itself will not change. The fictions under consideration here are characterized by a liberal ideology which has been perpetuated, and which still shapes social institutions. Since literary texts, and the critical treatment of them, are important cultural productions, a distinctively socialist feminist relationship to literary criticism comprises an academic participation in a collective feminist movement to re-adjust and re-direct a distorted, perverse understanding of social reality.

## II. "The Taming of the Individual": Social Place and Private Conscience in the Rhetorical Structures of Moll Flanders

Defoe in his inscription of the life of Moll Flanders, a female criminal, is motivated by the impulses of charitable reform; he is also intent in the fiction on a jealous defense of bourgeois patriarchal interests against the threat of women and the poor. The rhetorical structures of Moll Flanders[1] represent the need for a sympathetic repression of women and the lower orders to prevent their predatory incursions upon the hierarchy of gender and class. Moll's wide-ranging career occasions multifarious didactic examples which suggest the need to improve and to stabilize the individual feminine position within society; her narrative also depicts the vulnerability of social institutions and private property to the encroachments of displaced women, and of falsely situated upstarts. The pathos of the situation of the abandoned orphan, of subjugated wives and servants, and of the fearfulness of women on their own, is offset by the pervasive dangers of unscrupulous sexual exchanges, uxoriousness, and feminine initiative. Defoe's narrative ratifies the eighteenth-century liberal notion that women and the lower orders should be excluded from citizenry, but not from the formation of rationally organized community; Defoe defines the rational limits of individual liberty within society in

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[1]Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. (1722), ed. G.B. Starr (London: Oxford UP, 1971). All further references will be to this text.

showing what happens when Moll is set, or sets herself, beyond them. The heroine's biography is schematically repetitive; she is an outsider, always left to make a new beginning, to establish herself from scratch. As an aged, reformed sinner, Moll relates the history of her inventive mind and female body, and explicitly warns her readers against the moral and material dangers she herself has experienced or that readers are likely to encounter in the likes of her; her tale is hortatory in its rendering of the tragi-comic consequences of any attempts to alter social distinctions. Moll desires to attain feminine gentility, but misconceives, like nearly everyone else in her society, the properties of any social status. Moll parodies roles--including that of the male gender, in her guise as Gabriel Spencer--and stations, through her manners, costumes, arguments, and writings, but she in her meretricious poses terrifies herself and undermines the public interest. The puckish, anarchic consequences of her duplicitous conduct are rooted in a generalized confusion about the morality of social place.

Defoe's narrative frequently telescopes the issues of sex and capital to focus on the moral problem of hierarchy. Two instances of obliquely performed incest, once with the deluded younger brother of Moll's first lover, and again with her own, initially undiscovered, younger half-brother, are paradigmatic of this pattern. The first younger brother, Robin, romantically argues that Moll's natural superiority

of beauty and grace is primary, and overrides her poverty: thereafter, the elder brother foists on Robin Moll, his mistress, upon whom he has bestowed a secret fortune of at least five hundred pounds. (That his verbal gallantry is frequently directed against his own natural sisters, who are less charming but endowed with acknowledged fortunes, complicates the joke/travesty further.) Later, Moll reverses her financial pretense, manipulating her courtly "wit-battle" with Humphrey, her unknown brother, so that it becomes the grounds of a chivalrous contract; he is forced to gracefully accept a widow and a sister without a fortune. But Moll's sexual crimes, like her crimes of theft, though they are inevitably either psychologically or economically disadvantageous, are the undesired means to her constantly desired end: she wants to be a prosperous, respectable, happily married, maternal gentlewoman. She is first reunited with her mother after deceiving Humphrey into marriage; then, having been transported as a convict to America with her favourite husband "Jemy," she is reunited with her and Humphrey's eldest son and through him appropriates and enhances her mother's estate. Her salvation is interposed between her bastardy--the paradox of her anonymous yet notorious status, emblematized by her numerous epithets, but which do not fix her identity--and the fortuitous, felicitous reconstruction of her past which locates her and therefore gratifies her sensibility and awards her a legitimate economic legacy. The ideological thrust of

Defoe's narrative is to save and to properly place Moll to the credit of bourgeois men. When the aging Moll is finally treated to reasonable, well-intentioned male stewardship--a guidance devoid of sexual or economic intentions--she undergoes first spiritual conversion, then social legitimacy. The private operation of religious covenant occurs for Moll through the male agency of a "Minister," who is, unlike the venal, drunken Newgate ordinary, upright, and who has her spiritual welfare at heart. Although he works to gain her "Reprieve" (290), he is no believer in reform by transportation because, she says, "he fear'd I should lose the good impressions, which a prospect of Death had at first made on me, and which were since encreas'd by his Instructions . . ." (306). Moll's self-revelation not only to her elderly husband Jemy, himself a permanent outcast (he will be hanged if discovered), but also to her gracious, industrious grown son in America, completes Moll's appropriate yet unidealized (Moll's story contains nothing of the miraculous) relation to public, social contracts and institutions.

Born in Newgate, Moll is abandoned (she frequently finds herself in the position of "a loose unguided Creature" [128]) to deserve and to undergo such bondage in her own right. She repeats her mother's (and the first mother, Eve's) criminality, but then inherits the financial fruits of her mother's reformed life in the New World. Moll, in turn, makes her son/nephew her heir--while the use of her

"patrimony," in the meantime, overjoys her Jemy; patrilineality is therefore enacted, and Moll's tenuous, "Friendless" (190) state, which she constantly bewails, is resolved. Moll becomes, then, through the improper performance of social institutions and her own fallen nature, a sexual/social outlaw until she is, in her old age, providentially integrated within the prosperity and integrity of the propertied kinship system. That Moll is "not so extraordinary a Penitent, as she was at first" (5) only emphasizes her frailty, and society's good fortune that she has been taken in hand by worthy men. It is beguilingly fitting to the intentionality of Moll Flanders, as well as an apt contribution to the technique of realism, the illusion of authenticity, that the "Editor" in his "Preface" to Moll's "history" describes his necessary and delicate role as a sort of textual midwife in the revision and legitimization of Moll's profane cast of mind. Moll Flanders, in spite of her remorse, is still, "being the Off-spring of Debauchery and Vice," in need of "The Pen" of a conscientious, public-spirited writer for "the new dressing up of this Story"; though he is indeed "hard put to wrap it up so clean" and as "modestly" as is necessary for the reader's edification, the corrected narrative can safely be recommended to the tasteful, thoughtful reader (1). Moll, notwithstanding her rebirth in Christ, is yet a natural woman--she inherits, of course, Eve's nakedness, and is marked as well with the rhetorical afterbirth of her sins.

It is up to the editor/man-midwife to decently clothe if not to purify her thoughts: the bastardy of her language will not be published amongst the audience.

Moll's projects of financial and domestic exploits gain her only spurious status. Her self-willed desire for prosperity and gentility is sociologically and religiously untenable: Moll's welfare, the narrative proves, cannot exist apart from the economic, legal, and spiritual imperatives supervised by privileged male authorities. While Moll's insidious attempts to promote her own interest are encouraged--as she repeatedly points out--by the negligence and wantonness of her victims, her accounts moreover comprise an indictment of a male government that is remiss in its charitable and educational schemes and in its domestic management, and which consequently places both Moll and her society at risk. Society's failure to assess Moll's feminine value with benevolent wisdom--to determine, that is, her best interests within a domestic order--and therefore to shrewdly protect private property, provides the context for public mischief and private grief. Moll's self-presentation mirrors her society's distorted, superficial perspective of herself and her relation to her community. The cruel futility of the heroine's attempts to exploit the "freedom" of her undefined social identity reveals itself in the constant and violent shifts she experiences between "Fortunes and Misfortunes" ("Titlepage"). Moll is obsessively secretive, yet proud of

her recognition and fame; she views herself as a commodity ("with a tolerable fortune in my Pocket, I put no small value upon myself" [59]), but her cynical self-evaluation jars with her memories of a debilitating strength of feeling; her bravado in detailing her successful schemes is countered by the record of her frequent involvement in ridiculous, horrible scrapes. The end to Moll's chronic anxiety about her material well-being coincides with a reversal of the nature of her status with both her blood family, and her only beloved husband. Moll is finally integrated by inheritance rather than incest into her mother's line through her happy association with her son Humphrey, the namesake of Moll's unhappy husband/brother. And Moll is joined, the second time, to her "Lancashire husband" (185) out of sexual love rather than financial greed. Her financial and sexual relations are blessed with integrity after her religious conversion; that her gratitude to God, her husband, and her son may be coloured by vanity or greed does not, however, discount the importance of her latter-day salvation: having been given rein, from the age of eight, to pursue self-determining, self-destructive changes, Moll is finally subdued through assimilation into legitimate family and property relations.

The forms of Moll's entrepreneurial gentlewomanship are founded on fluid notions of her social status. As an intelligent and dutiful child in a charity school in Colchester, Moll is reluctant to go into service,

partly--presumably warned on the evidence of common experience--for fear of abuse ("they will Beat me, and the Maids will Beat me to make me do great Work" [11]), and partly out of disinclination to do menial work (". . . I was able to do but very little Service where ever I was to go, except it was to run of Errands, and be a Drudge to some Cook-Maid, and this they told me of often" [10]). Her novel plea for "gentlewoman's" work instead makes her a curiosity and the pet of the town ladies. Moll's concept of gentility, which is, ironically, fostered by the genteel themselves, is also shaped, typically, both by her sense of self-preservation and by her pride. She embarks on a series of complexly scandalous, exploitative domestic arrangements in which the abuse of sexual fidelity and of legal forms is clearly at issue. She then drifts into another course, becoming, in keeping with her purblind view of the parts rather than the whole of her ideal social standing, a skilled, even inspired, public thief of rich fabric and lace, gold watches, silver plate, and other synecdochical paraphernalia of feminine gentility. (Indeed, her theft of a Dutch gentleman's "Hamper" [264] at Harwich involves Moll, because of its bulk and masculine contents, in peculiar entanglements and dangers; her one arbitrary attempt at the male science of horse-thieving ends fatuously: "this was a Robbery and no Robbery" [254].) Moll neither comprehends, nor submits to, her rightful place as an orphaned parish child. Her protean conceptions of herself are especially

evident, during her life as a brazen criminal, in her assumption of various costumes (" . . . I had several Shapes to appear in" [238]), although, to be sure, she appears most often and feels most confident in her imposture as a gentlewoman. In one escapade, the ambiguously conceived role--that of a needlewoman, living by her "Fingers Ends" (11)--which Moll wills for herself as a child, is curiously parodied. Moll, dressed in men's clothing, is nearly taken in one of her light-fingered ventures; she ends the pursuit by taking refuge in the clothes and attitudes of an industrious seamstress, attended by a girl (217)--so that the scene intriguingly includes both a throwback and a projection of Moll's scheme as "the little gentlewoman" (12). Moll, in Colchester, forestalls the Magistrates' decision that she go into service; in this episode, she again evades the necessary, if drastic, decision of a Magistrate to imprison her. Moll is poignant in her childhood trepidation, and, later, pitiable in her guilty fear. But the inevitable pathos of Moll's predicaments does not obviate the imperatives of justice. Her imposition on the social order and on the working of formal justice is preposterous and futile: she ends where she began--in Newgate prison. Until the time of her religious conversion and familial reconciliation, she criminally disobeys the restrictions of her sex and class. Her culpable freakishness flourishes in every aspect of English society: in public and in private; in London and in the towns; in genteel and in

vicious milieux. Moll Flanders is, then, a cautionary tale, protective of existing prerogatives as it recommends the correction of individuals and the amendment of institutional conduct to oppose the moral and social disorder threatened by women, and by servants, not treated according to humane yet well-regulated practices. Defoe's narrative substantiates the bourgeois patriarchal paradigm of the household controlled by a male head: the heroine's uncontrolled, enterprising activity menaces her society. The text affirms the sanctified incorporation of women and the serving classes into a benign hierarchy through its allusive literary structures and resonant constructions of the feminine. The presence in Moll Flanders of fairy tale and Biblical typology is congruent with the transmogrification of the novel to chapbook, where Moll is viewed as a raunchy folk-heroine and as a miraculously saved sinner. But Maximillian E. Novak in Realism, Myth and History in Defoe's Fiction, in undertaking to explain the appeal of Moll Flanders, makes much of the apotheosis of the criminal Moll into "'blessed Mary'"[2] by "Borrow's fruit woman"[3] in his contention that Defoe's narrative is mythic, and his heroine "the prototype of the eternal female"[4]; given Moll's life and times, this ascription is dubious, even ludicrous: for which of her actions or attributes qualifies as "eternally feminine"--lying? fornicating? thieving? being fatherless?

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[2]Maximillian E. Novak, Realism, Myth and History in Defoe's Fiction (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) 72.
[3]Novak 75.
[4]Novak 95.

containing a repeatedly exercised uterus? Ian A. Bell's Defoe's Fiction, another recent publication, is a more theoretically coherent address to the critical issue of audience reception; he delineates a clear distinction between the process of popular reading and the reading of "high"[5] texts by "Polite readers."[6] Bell maintains that readers of Defoe are, according to "Defoe's own very rigid social scheme, given in his analysis of the constituents of society,"[7] "of the middle sort";[8] this audience finds pleasure in vicarious identification with Moll's depravity, even as it is reassured of the good fortune of its own respectability. Bell also argues that the novelty of the heroine lies in the revelation of her character in a "strange series of irrational scruples"[9] about, it would seem, issues of sexual conduct--"abortion and incest."[10] He refers to contemporary sources, including "the theorists of natural law," legal decisions, and "other popular discourses,"[11] which suggest that neither abortion nor incest was considered as repugnant as Moll finds them. But the horror the heroine describes on dressing like a man, in

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[5]Ian A. Bell, Defoe's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1985) 62.
[6]Bell 55.
[7]Bell 6.
[8]Daniel Defoe, The Review vi, 142. The seven classes in society seen by Defoe were: 1) The great, who live profusely; 2) The rich, who live very plentifully; 3) The middle sort, who live well; 4) The working trades, who labour hard but feel no want; 5) The country people, farm etc., who fare indifferently; 6) The poor, that fare hard, 7) The miserable, that really pinch and suffer want.
[9]Bell 146.
[10]Bell 136.
[11]Bell 135.

considering the extremes of sexual conduct like incest, or in the denial of maternal feeling in abortion, confirms the ontological imperatives of her gender: Moll's feelings are not arbitrary, but "natural." Her reactiveness is consistent with Defoe's purpose in condemning Moll's picaresque progress. While it may be that popular readers--like the pirate printers of Moll Flanders--excise Defoe's public purpose to focus on the familiar seduction of prurient adventure and comfortable moralizing, this is to speculate on the obtuseness or wilfullness of the eighteenth-century reader. Certainly, reader response to affective type may be automatic, a recognition of assimilated cultural/literary precedent; this does not preclude a conscious engagement with Defoe's social platform and theological discourse.

The serious contention of Defoe's rhetorically dense narrative--that women and the poor deserve consideration within hierarchy--is subverted in the simplified linear plots of the eighteenth-century chapbooks and ballads about Moll Flanders which celebrate her criminality'[2] through the course of literary history by the emotional appeal not of Moll's crimes, but of the lurid subject of a criminal woman. Nineteenth-century critics gather their skirts about them as they discuss Moll Flanders, recoiling from the crudity of

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[2]Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders (London: A. Swindell, n. d. [ca. 1750]) 24. Undated Ballads, "M." (London: J. Pitts, n. d. [ca. 1810]). Daniel Defoe, Fortune's Fickle Distribution, in a chapbook ed. of Moll Flanders (London: n. p., 1730) 91. Quoted in Novak 158-59.

Moll's low, vicious life.'[13] In the twentieth century, a sort of Pavlovian response to the textual subject typifies a voyeuristic mental structure, evident in the scholarly sniggering--often, significantly, appearing in footnotes or parentheses, peeping and taunting from between the frame of brackets or from the safe distance of the margins'[14]--at Moll's sexual intercourse and precocious, adept thievery. That is to say, Defoe's text is the location of cultural-historical obsessions with sex, and, as feminists point out, in our culture sex is equated with sin, and women are the sin in sex.'[15] Sex/woman/sin, in a predictable, sinister paradox, fascinates and repels. The literary critical lack of feminist consciousness lends itself to unnecessary, manifold problems of textual interpretation. For instance, Ian A. Bell remarks that Moll Flanders is not pornographic; this he obscurely attributes to Moll's "never fully dispersed" innocence, as if, inexplicably, only a "cynical"[16] woman could describe and arouse the prurient

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[13]"The life of a courtezan . . . must contain much matter unfit to be presented to a virtuous mind." Walter Wilson, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel De Foe (1830). Quoted in Pat Rogers, ed., Defoe: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 93. Hazlitt is appalled by the novel: Moll Flanders is utterly vile and detestable. . . ." William Hazlitt, Edinburgh Review 1 (January 1830). Quoted in Rogers 110. Another critic warns that the "narrated incident and expression" in Moll Flanders is offensive to "the delicacy of modern readers." Anon., National Review iii (October 1856). Quoted in Rogers 130.

[14]Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970) 144.

[15]see Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography, dir. Bonnie Sherr Klein, National Film Board of Canada, 1981.

[16]Bell 129.

desire for the painful pleasures of sexual degradation. But there are more compelling reasons to explain how Defoe in his novel "avoids pornography"[10]: he does not objectify the woman's body; the heroine does not state or depict ritual excitement in response to sexual fear or humiliation; most importantly, Defoe contextualizes Moll's behaviour. Her sexual encounters, unlike, indeed, some of her thefts, are always linked to casuistical problems, as well as to the tactical, material considerations which may conjure ironic comedy but not sexual exploitativeness. The textual connectedness of psychology and morality to Moll's sexual encounters, that is, aligns her history to the conventions of Anglican and Puritan autobiography, in which, according to G. A. Starr, the writer is "to get beyond the merely documentary," for "fact was to serve purely as ground for reflection."[11] In other words, in Moll Flanders the heroine's sexuality cannot be considered apart from her conversion experience or her sexual deviance from its implications for a coherent social structure. Defoe evaluates Moll's sexual adventures as a defiance of the ways of God and Man.

Moll's evasion of the expectations of her class origins is as much a subject of wonder, scandal, and moral condemnation as the incidents of her sexual history. Her spurious transformations, whether of maiden pauper to gentle

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[10]Bell 129.
[11]G. A. Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1965) 27.

wife, deserted wife or mistress to "Widow of Fortune" (138), or of obscure thief to street heroine, are worked by herself and by her society, accomplishing more "Work for Repentance" (238) for Moll. For most of Moll's life, the circumstances normally attendant on beggarly females are remarkably suspended; she repeatedly rises above her original expectations, and eludes the consequences of her gender, class, and crimes to a surprising extent: Moll has an incorrigible talent for insinuating herself into any of the modes of her society. Hence, having first been overcome, on her imprisonment in Newgate, by the recollection that she is returning to her birthplace, "the Place where my Mother suffered so deeply" and, she reminds herself, "where I was brought into the World" (273), her later, oblivious remark that she is shortly as accustomed to the horrors of the prison "as if indeed I had been born there" (278) has the force of self-parody. But the heroine of Moll Flanders is neither a feminine scapegoat, nor the only butt of Defoe's social criticism. She complies with the sensibilities and expectations of a society whose ethical and conceptual shortcomings permit her variable status and the consequent subversion of the moral and hierarchical order. Her protean identity is enacted through the operation, in herself and in her society, of egocentric and sacrilegious yearnings-- specifically, covetousness and the craving for dominance. The performance of these psychic, moral transgressions is regarded in different contexts in Moll Flanders, so that

conclusions [illegible] public good and private conduct can be drawn from concrete yet comprehensive evidence. The reader is invited to make instructive judgements--Moll calls herself "a Storehouse of useful warning to those that read" (268) her autobiographical confession--concerning her penitential yet damning testimony. The characters are frequently negligent of their own welfare, and refuse to soberly defer to authoritative counsel. The disruptiveness of ill-advised, precipitous, self-aggrandizing action is manifested, to choose a random case, in the instance of Moll's apprehension, for a theft she has not committed, by a combative "Journeyman" (241) who rashly and impudently ignores the misgivings of his prevaricating "Master" (242). Subsequently, the "Justice" apologetically excuses Moll and finds the "Mercer" and his "Man" at fault for causing a "Breach of the Peace" (248), the two men are humiliated by the mob, and, because Moll puts herself forward as a gentlewoman, they are further punished for their supposed disrespect for rank: Moll triumphs. Moll's harassers are guilty--but she is a thief, and she is not a gentlewoman. Society, like the shop-keeper, fails to be properly vigilant, and does not preserve justice coherently. Incidentally, yet crucially, this episode also includes the exhibition of a characteristically injudicious lust for the possession of Moll: she is, from childhood, by turn inappropriately desired and seized, and released and abandoned to her own devices. Such a narrative pattern

withholds conventional, romantic satisfactions from Moll and the expectant reader. Defoe dispenses with the typical psychic and sexual fate of the lady--suffering, suspense, and marriage--early on: in an inversion of marriage and sexual initiation, Moll is first a fornicator, then a quasi-incestuous wife; her numerous sexual contracts are all grounded on mutually scurrilous material and carnal motivations. And although the narrator is a convicted thief, the closure of Moll Flanders is not that of a gallows confession: Moll dies, not violently, but, surely, old, happy, and peaceful, in bed. Defoe neither titillates nor avenges: Moll Flanders denies the typical climactic fates of the virgin and the criminal. The narrative is more purposefully prescriptive: Moll speaks as one who concedes her sinfulness, and denies the efficacy of her feminine crime.

Even the penitent heroine is not idealized, however; Moll's post-salvation, post-Newgate happiness is compromised. She does not, for a start, end "so extraordinary a Penitent" (5) as she began. Reform is elusive; although Moll in America selectively disregards facets of her past to create the illusion of pleasant sentimental crises or utopian bliss, history cannot be forgotten or escaped. The pathos of her reunion with her child Humphrey is offset by the facts of her sinful begetting and callous abandonment of her many children: Humphrey, her "only" (333) son, is the offspring of an

incestuous and illegitimate marriage, and only one of the twelve children she has delivered, ten of whom were bastards. In gratefully accepting her gift of a gold watch to him, Humphrey is receiving stolen goods but, Moll suggests to the reader, "that's by the way" (338). Even when Moll admits the incidents of her shameful past she underplays their significance; but while bad memories can be ignored, bad habits cannot. Jemy, who is as a husband like Humphrey as a son in being best-loved rather than "only" beloved, lacks Humphrey's chivalrous, dutiful willingness to serve Moll by his industry and canny management. He is an insufficiently commanding husband who lacks a sense of occupation and decorum proper to his place on an American plantation: "he was bred a Gentleman, and by Consequence was not only unacquainted, but indolent, and when we did Settle, would much rather go out into the Woods with his Gun which they call there Hunting, and which is the ordinary Work of the Indians, and which they do as Servants . . ." (328). Moll is vexed by Jemy's laxness and absurdly aristocratic pretension; indeed, having been lavishly courted by her gentlemanly but astute son, she "began secretly now to wish," she says, "that I had not brought my Lancashire Husband from England at all" (335). The modern estate in America is peopled, however, by those who maintain old-world vices. Indeed, in egalitarian America, "many a Newgate bird becomes a great Man . . ." (86); this is a country of culpable governors. The heroine's American household accepts

the fruits of English sexual immorality when one of her maidservants is delivered of a child, conceived on board ship from England: Moll, in her turn, must assume the responsibility of a mistress in charge of bastards and wayward servants. Moll's own story of her life in an irredeemed society comes full circle in the New World.

Moll, a bastard child from Newgate, recalls that she "wandered among a crew of those People they call Gypsies . . ." (9).'' She is unclear about her history with these people: she says she cannot "tell how I came among them, or how I got from them"; that the Gypsies have not artificially "discolour'd" her skin confirms her essential separateness from them (9). In Colchester, on the other hand, away from nomadic, heathenish Gypsies, Moll's ambiguous, tentative status is rectified. Her exotic if confused story lends her, a quintessentially obscure child, notoriety; the resulting judgement about her future place is sympathetically improvised:

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''When Moll resorts to stealing for a living, she protests that she has not "any Acquaintance among that Tribe" (201)--among thieves--but she has, significantly, lived among a tribe of Gypsies as a child. And like those Gypsies, who "could not be found" to be made accountable to the Colchester magistrates, Moll as a thief contrives quick, devious escape routes through the countryside (264-68) as well as through city streets (192). Moll's criminal characteristics and actions are in many other ways equivalent to the lives and characters--as propounded by popular racialism--of her "heathenish" comrades/kidnappers. "Gypsy" is a cant, misogynist word, derived from racist conceptions, denoting a cunning, deceitful, fickle woman; in one of Donne's sermons, "Gypsie-knots" refers to transitory, un-Christian marriages. Moll, like the Gypsies, spends much of her life "wandering," her eye on the main chance, randomly acquiring and disposing of children.

> 'as my Case came to be known, and that I was too young to do any Work, being not above three Years old, Compassion mov'd the Magistrates of the Town to order some Care to be taken of me, and I became one of their own, as much as if I had been born in the Place.' (9)

In Moll's peculiar "Case," natural justice is arbitrarily instituted; but Moll cites the precedent of a fixed social program in one of England's "Neighbor Nations" (7) which would forestall, in England, the unwarranted perplexity of her situation:

> 'Children, as such are generally unprovided for . . . are immediately taken into the Care of the Government, and put into an Hospital call'd the House of Orphans, where they are Bred up, Cloath'd, Fed, Taught, and when fit to go out, are plac'd out to Trades, or to Services, so as to be well able to provide for themselves by an honest industrious Behaviour.' (7-8)

However, having been decreed, in Colchester,"one of their own," an incorporated member of the community, Moll goes on to be disestablished, through a series of audacious, proprietorial enterprises of the local gentlefolk, from her initial expectations and security as a female servant. She is encouraged and adopted as a pseudo-gentlewoman by the mother of a genteel family--the father, distracted by business, is ignorant of family affairs--embraced as a rake's mistress, and espoused by a gentleman's second son. Moll maintains, that is, the uniquely unfixed condition of being which distinguishes her initial, troublesome appearance in Colchester. Defoe's prejudices about class and gender are plainly signified in the early episode of the narrative: what is lucky for Moll--that she is not condemned

to the usual fate of the English prison child--is, through the violation of the male gentry's reasonable, charitable intent, unlucky for England. The heroine and her society become mutually exploitative.

Although Moll, by scandal-mongering and other dishonest pretenses, successfully helps "a young Lady at the next House to me" to force her arrogant suitor to answer questions "about his Character, his Morals, or Substance" (68), Moll Flanders for the most part denies the ability of women to oversee feminine welfare; and, what is even more insidious, the novel, by means of a rhetorical design which includes weakly linked causal chains, associates the exercise of feminine initiative not only with frivolous pastimes, but also with sexual sin, domestic insurgency, and public crime. Moll's desperate desire to be a "Gentlewoman" (11), by which she means, one who earns her living through independent work ("to get," she says, "my Bread by my own Work" [13]), is not outlandish, but forme[illegible]rom her naive ideas about such women. Although the neighbour Moll explicitly cites as a gentlewoman is a local lace-mender and, in a bawdy irony, and unbeknownst to the child Moll, a prostitute (14), Moll's "Nurse," "a Woman who was indeed Poor, but had been in better circumstances, having liv'd before that in good Fashion . . ." (9), "got a little Livelihood" by raising, and educating, in "a little School," parish children (9). She is truly gentle, and unlike the lace-mender, not sexually tainted, yet she works, for the

parish, for her keep. However, the nurse, though a goodly woman, is not presented as a wholly valuable model: her pedagogy is suspect. Even before interceding for Moll to delay her assignment to her proper occupation ("she wou'd speak to Mr. Mayor, and I should not go into Service till I was bigger" [11]), the nurse helps to shape Moll into the stuff of an indulged upper servant through her instruction. The nurse's training of the children in her charge is, in the last of its three elements, suspect, out of place: they are raised "Religiously, Housewifly and Clean, and Very Mannerly, with good Behavior as if we had been at the Dancing School" (10). The nurse, moreover, goes on to teach Moll, assuming the unseemly interest of a "meer Mother" (15), to transform cast-off clothing "to the best advantage" (15) (the nurse also spends Moll's money to buy her "Head-Dresses, and Linnen, and Gloves and Ribbons" [14]). But her work with Moll to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear is spurious, and ends, ultimately, in the girl's seduction. Moll learns the needle-working skills of a lady's maid; she knows how to care for the material "stuff" of gentility, and to imitate the superficial graces of genteel speech and bearing, but she is innocent of the meaning and importance of feminine chastity either to herself or to ladies and gentlemen. Just as she mistakes for a gentlewoman a whore who makes lace, so she misinterprets the admiration of the elder brother, and succumbs to his rakish morality.

The education Moll vicariously acquires as a young woman in a genteel household amplifies and elaborates her "Dancing School" manners--Moll actually learns to dance, for one thing. Moll lists her possession of three new feminine virtues, rendering them in the comparative mode, for she is placed, it turns out, in subtle competition with the real young ladies of the house: she is "Handsomer," "better shap'd," and "Sung better" (18). She excels, that is, in the most superficial qualities of ladies--for she has no fortune--and of Christians, for hers are natural, rather than moral, attributes. Nevertheless, Moll's presentation is judged superior to that of the sisters according to "the opinion of all that knew the Family" (19). The immediate consequence of this supercilious attention is that the sons of the household take notice of her: their mother had officiously taken in Moll to be a companion to her daughters, but Moll becomes instead their rival, and a mistress and a wife, in succession, to the sons. Moll is privately ruined by the elder brother, while Robin's courtship of her puts the house into an "Uproar" (42), and their marriage, conducted without the consent of the absent father (the mother is persuaded to allow the wedding, "even without acquainting the Father, other than by Post Letters" [57]), is not only indecorous but immoral.

Superfluous manners and ornaments for girls of all classes derive from a thoughtless feminine supervision which is actually endangering. In the instance of Moll's robbery

of a necklace from a child who is walking from her "Dancing School" (195), and whom Moll is tempted to murder, Moll suspects the mother's "Vanity" (195), and further supposes the sexual dalliance of the child's delinquent maid ("a careless Jade" [195]). While her reflections are most certainly a rationalization which distracts Moll from the consideration of her own blame, her editorial instruction has, nonetheless, structural integrity. Later, Moll as a more seasoned thief robs the younger of two sisters who are of real gentility. They neither work in a parish school nor walk home from dancing school, but ride in a coach, and stroll in St. James's Park--but they are unaccompanied by their maid, so that Moll steals a gold watch and is further tempted, not to murder this time, but to get away with a "Necklace" (259) as well. Moll evinces not even a perfunctory remorse in this case, yet the delinquency of the children's female keepers, their mother and "Mrs. Chime" (258), as well as the gullibility and loquacity of their footman and the wild distraction of the crowd when royalty is rumoured to be present, justifies, not Moll's crime, but cynicism about the vain parading of girls. The insistence on childish vulnerability and the carelessness of mothers and servants indicts, even as it points to Moll's participation in, the reductive view of females as goods for traffic.

Moll is for the most part viewed in Colchester as a disposable, if jealously possessed, property; she is a female servant to be toyed with and patronized. Moll learns

to reciprocate this self-regarding attitude to social contract by the time she leaves, a widow, for London. The Mayor and the Mayoress of Colchester, and their "two Daughters" (12), are moved to hilarity by Moll's innocent appropriation of the designation "gentlewoman," and the ladies capriciously reward her for her ingenuous ambition--"they lik'd my little Prattle to them, which it seems was agreeable enough to them" (13)--with flattering attention and gifts of money, as well as by teaching her needleworking skills, and by giving her such work to earn money. In a sort of sartorial adoption of Moll, the town ladies hand down their clothes, and their children's, to her, as they would to a domestic favourite. The gifts of cast-off ladies' and children's clothes are emblematic of the multiple, contradictory identities with which Moll is gifted: she is neither child nor woman, charity girl nor servant.

Moll's alienated status is bleakly apparent when her charmed life is interrupted by the death of the nurse, the poor gentlewoman who has been a "meer Mother" to Moll: she is once again in a beggarly way (the narrator remarks, sardonically, that "now I was a poor Gentlewoman indeed" [17]). She is further at the mercy of the nurse's contemptuous real "Daughter" (17), who is Moll's perceived rival for the "two and twenty Shillings" the nurse kept "in Hand" (16) for Moll. However, Moll thereafter becomes herself the object of feminine rivalry; she is regarded as

another of the nurse's chattels, and ownership of her is disputed: when she has been claimed by one lady, the Mayoress is indignant, arguing, Moll recalls, that "I was hers by Right" (18). Possession, though, is nine-tenths of the law: "they that had me, would not part with me" (18). Within this triumphantly accommodating household, which, like the Mayor's, includes two daughters, Moll absorbs the "Instruction" and "Direction" of the young ladies' education through "Imitation and enquiry" (18); in addition, the sisters condescend to "learn me every thing that they had been Taught themselves . . ." (18). But Moll mortifies the young ladies by superseding her role as a flattering replica of themselves, and, as their brother Robin predicts, "rides in a Coach before" them (21); Moll becomes their sister. And the mother's vague intentions for her seized orphan--Moll conveniently makes up the "Number" when the sisters practice "Country Dances" (18)--are similarly overtaken when Moll becomes her unlikely, if temporary, daughter; when Robin dies, Moll goes on to make her own way in London, leaving her children with their grandparents with the callous goodwill reminiscent of the ladies of her acquaintance: "and that by the way was all they got by Mrs. Betty" (59). Moll has learned from her past experience as a child and from the example of her betters: she removes herself from the household where, without a husband, she would be an encumbrance, and leaves behind her what, without a father, would be to her expensive burdens: her children. Once

widowed, she regards her Colchester family as an inherited debt from which she must extricate herself. Ironically, the aged mother and father are, this time, legally obligated to house and educate orphans.

The ladies look to Moll for diversion; their prurient desire is paralleled in the elder brother's sexual interest in her. He, like his female counterparts, imposes a whimsical identity on Moll; the ladies have celebrated her as "the little Gentlewoman" (14), while the elder brother cajoles her with the name of the generic maid, "Mrs. Betty" (20). He uses the same tactics as the real gentlewomen to secure her gratitude and compliance in flattering her with verbal attention (20) and in stimulating her affability with gifts of money (23): the gentleman is carnally, as the ladies have been modishly, anxious to visit and to see her; he, like them, is prurient about Moll. And Moll points out that the ladies misjudge her understanding and sophistication ("always if they ask'd me whether I resolved to be a gentlewoman, I answer'd YES: At least one of them ask'd me, what a Gentlewoman was? that puzzel'd me much . . ." [13]), and that the elder brother overestimates her virtue ("had my young Master offer'd it at first Sight, he might have taken any Liberty he thought fit with me; but he did not see his Advantage . . ." [22]). The gentlefolk perceive in Moll uncanny intelligence and moral rectitude, where it does not exist. Seduced by their selfishly projected interest in her, they invest too much significance

in the substance of Moll's thoughts and feelings. By denying that she is commonplace, an ignorant, acquisitive, vulnerable serving woman, they inflict suffering on her. The strict maintenance of social distinctions, it seems, would protect the lower orders from humiliation and corruption.

Robin is perversely intent on asserting his masculine will over his mother, his sisters, and Moll. He upbraids his weaker and less articulate sisters

> with their being Homely, and having never had any Sweet-heart, never having been ask'd the Question, and their being so forward as almost to ask first: He rallied them upon the Subject of Mrs. Betty; how Pretty, how good Humour'd, how she Sung better than they did, and Danc'd better, and how much Handsomer she was; and in doing this, he omitted no Ill-natur'd Thing that could vex them, and indeed, push'd too hard upon them . . . . (45)

He even overrules Moll's ardent resistance to his proposals ("he had ask'd her no less than five Times" [53]), badgering her, as he does his sisters, to distraction. In response to his mother's serious objection that Moll "is a Beggar" (46), Robin rudely jests (46), with poorly conceived wit, and revealing a cavalier insensitivity to Moll's precarious, dependent position, that

> 'I'll take her off the hands of the Parish, and she and I'll Beg together . . . We'll come and beg your Pardon Madam; and your Blessing Madam, and my Fathers.' (46)

The elder brother takes advantage of Robin's thoughtless resolve to calculatedly rid himself of Moll: he, in Moll's words, "manag'd me" (57). He has, unlike the women of the household, persuasive powers over the younger brother: he elicits Robin's unwitting ". . . Thanks of a faithful Friend

for shifting off his Whore into his Brothers Arms for a wife" (58); he also contrives Robin's ignorance of Moll's broken maidenhead by taking "care to make him very much Fuddled before he went to Bed . . ." (57). Moll is genuinely affected by her lover's betrayal; at first, she becomes ill. She recalls also that before her wedding "it was easie to see I should go to Church, like a Bear to the Stake" (57); during the "five years" after her marriage, before Robin's death, "...I was never in Bed with my Husband, but I wish'd myself in the Arms of his Brother" (54). But long before the time of her farcical courtship and marriage to Robin, which exalts her socially, but which Moll regards as psychic torture, the reader is prepared for the chilling inevitability of Moll's horrific moral confusion. Her pain is a natural consequence of her feminine vanity and first youthful sexual indiscretion: in letting the elder brother "do just what he pleas'd" (29), she is, she says, "forsaken of my Vertue, and my Modesty," and therefore, she further intones, has "nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God's Blessing, or Man's Assistance" (29). Having consented to fornication, Moll is doomed to suffer torment in the marriage bed, and to endure a variety of self-inflicted cheats and griefs in her successive, godless marriages. Defoe is not overtly vindictive in his narration of the heroine's fall; rather, he is profoundly sympathetic to her fallen state of mind. The narrative, after all, is arranged not only to prescribe feminine conduct, but to

advocate a set of social relations which would prevent female crime.

Defoe's rhetorical construction of the contrapuntal relationship of motive, discourse, and moral effect in the domestic setting reveals a belief in the tragic susceptibility of women to cruelly obdurate, lascivious men and--make no mistake--to women's own worst instincts, to their credulous vanity, when the social order is adjusted. With the father's abdication of his authority within his private jurisdiction ("he was a Man in a hurry of publick Affairs, and getting Money, seldom at Home, thoughtful of the main Chance; but left all those Things [family management] to his Wife" [54]), and the unjustifiable introduction by his wife of a beggarly beauty into the household, the mother is compromised and even bullied (the elder brother sets about, finally, "to Manage his Mother, and he never left till he had brought her to acquiesce, and be passive in the thing" [57]); the sisters are first humiliated by the younger brother, and then, in their acceptance of Moll's pretense to humility in refusing Robin's hand, are made fools of ("she has acted Handsomely indeed" [53] the elder sister concedes on hearing of Moll's insistence that her parents consent to her brother's match); the wages of Moll's sin are the status of gentlewoman, and moral ruin. The text affirms the obligation of the household head to supervise and maintain domestic subordination.

Moll Flanders, conceptually and schematically, links the heroine's attempts to advance her fortune to her need for salvation: her breaches of gender and class discipline are damnable evidence of her untrained conscience, and of her failure to interpret and obey moral and rational precepts. Moll is unprincipled, motivated by vanity and greed alone to rise in the social scale; gentility for her consists of the possession of a material facade. Her mistaken notions are instructive: the supervisory class--bourgeois men--must protect itself by instilling identifiable Christian moral virtues, so that its capacity to rule is apparent by means other than that of visible consumption. Bourgeois patriarchy in this way distinguishes itself, not only from the arbitrary privilege and obvious wealth associated with aristocratic power, but from those of the lower orders who lay false--or dubious claim to social recognition. Moll's false ideas about the congruence of social status and affluence are not corrected by any of her female instructors--from her childhood "nurse" to her wicked fence and procurer, whom she calls "Governess"--or by her husbands and lovers: instead, all of these characters either engender or affirm her faulty prejudices. As a result, Moll continues to compromise her dignity, her security, and her soul's good.

Moll looks, as a gay and crassly materialistic widow in London, for a man of variable stances; she finds such a protean creature in a "Draper," "a Land-water thing, call'd

a Gentleman-Tradesman" (60). Her "amphibious" husband is a frog-prince: they enjoy, through a terrific outlay of Moll's capital, a twelve-day romp in Oxford, riding in "a rich Coach," while, Moll says, "The Servants all call'd him my Lord . . . and I was her Honour, the Countess" (61). Part of the hilarity typically involved in Moll's trickery lies in the gullibility of the audience to her imposture; in this episode, Moll and her confederate, who are but wantonly, rakishly extravagant, easily convince others of their rank and sincerity. But her fairy-tale transformation in Oxford goes some way to defeating her urgent desire for assurance against poverty and obscurity; shortly afterwards, when the draper abandons her, she is in reduced circumstances. Ironically, the joke is on Moll as much as on those she has duped; she is taken in by the draper's confidence. Moll like her victims believes what she wants to hear, and sees what she wants to believe. Her inability to discriminate between illusion and actuality, between moral good and expedience, indicates a self-centred propensity to wish-fulfillment. This is clearly the case in the intricate circumstances of the cheats and deceptions of her subsequent marriages.

Impressed by a clerk's scrupulosity in the management of her business, and by his personal amiability, she views his household property within hours of meeting him as if, she says, it was "all my own" (139). Then, having travelled to Lancashire with a duplicitous woman "Friend" (141), she is carried to "a Gentleman's Seat, where was a numerous

Family, a large Park, extraordinary Company indeed" (141). This interlude, together with her encounter with the London clerk, predisposes Moll, when Jemy talks of his vast establishment--which is, of course, non-existent--both to cupidity, to a desire for the trappings of a well-fixed, sexually contented wife (even after their wedding, when Jemy is revealed as a fraud, Moll concedes that "he was a lovely Person indeed" [151]), and to credulity about Jemy's indeterminate catalogue of holdings:

> He had to give him his due, the Appearance of an extraordinary fine Gentleman; he was Tall, well Shap'd, and had an extraordinary Address; talk'd as naturally of his Park, and his Stables; of his Horses, his Game-Keepers, his Woods, his Tenants, and his Servants, as if we had been in the Mansion-House, and I had seen them all about me. (143)

She succumbs to the deceitful, shallow images of gentility. She thereafter only modifies her covetousness; her ideal of the worthy life changes in degree rather than intent. Moll claims that in her final marriage, to the clerk, she earnestly submits to a life of unprecedented propriety and satisfaction:

> 'I chose now to live retir'd, frugal, and within ourselves; I kept no Company, made no Visits; minded my Family, and obliged my Husband; and this kind of Life became a Pleasure to me.' (189)

She regards her marriage as a hiatus in the course of her profligate life; and although she only "flatter'd" herself that she "sincerely repented" (188), Moll is kept in check by a fear of living without the benefit of male prosperity and protection, and, she says, by the tenor of her husband's

modest habits:

> 'I Liv'd with this Husband in the utmost Tranquility; he was a Quiet, Sensible, Sober Man, Virtuous, Modest, Sincere, and in his Business Diligent and Just: His Business was in a narrow Compass, and his Income sufficient to keep a plentiful way of Living in the ordinary way; I do not say to keep an Equipage, and make a Figure as the World calls it, nor did I expect it, or desire it . . .' (188-89)

However, this model husband has married her in an inn rather than in a church, which suggests his inadequacy as a spiritual guide for his wife; moreover, he, like Moll, is bolstered only by financial security and the conventions of a comfortable domestic life. His psychic collapse in the face of business failure marks him as temperamentally as well as morally unreliable. Moll's own lack of a moral core is evident in the speed with which she abandons her design of respectable conduct on this husband's death and degenerates into a hardened criminal.

The heroine's self-exploiting gusto for self-increasing deception is strangely epitomized in her story of "a Woman" who accomplishes the replacement of her victim's watch of "Guineas" with "a sham Gold Watch" or "a Purse of Counters" (228) during the sex act. Moll herself counterfeits, after her meretricious relationship with her Bath lover, "a Widow Lady of great Fortune" (142) to attain a fourth husband, and "a modest sober Body" (138) to get a fifth. At the juncture between her life as a mistress and her entanglements before her fourth and fifth marriages, Moll considers that

> when a Woman is thus left desolate and void of Council, she is just like a Bag of Money, or a Jewel

> dropt on the Highway, which is a Prey to the next Comer; if a Man of Virtue and upright Principles happens to find it, he will have it cried, and the Owner may come to hear of it again; but how many times shall such a thing fall into Hands that will make no scruple of seizing it for their own, to once that it shall come into good Hands. (128)

The occasion of Moll's moralizing is, that some of her own money is lost, in "the Affair of the Hundred Pound which I left in the Hand of the Goldsmith" (128); her cast of mind is infused with peevishness. In addition, her recent rejection by her Bath lover adds to her pique (Moll does not communicate with her Bath landlady when the sexual affair is at an end, because she is "very loth she should know I was cast off" [125]). Moll and her money are at loose ends: she wants a man to rescue and to restore her. In her puzzling, figurative identification of autonomous women with lost treasure, Moll invokes referential meaning: she is a sinner to be cried like the woman's lost coin in the New Testament parable; she is a "talent" in need of a good steward. Moll desires to be saved by an honest man; she does not perceive the way to salvation. Moll in this passage eschews the precarious nature of feminine initiative as materially and psychically disadvantageous, and describes a strategy of self-seeking inertia to exploit masculine gallantry: "he will have it cried." But such passivity is efficacious for neither worldly nor redemptive purposes. Moll cries out during some of her robberies, to save her skin: as part of her strategy to forestall suspicion immediately following an abortive theft of "a Gentlewoman's gold Watch" in front of a

"Meeting-House," Moll "cried out," she says, "as if I had been kill'd" (211); and, having been seized by a zealous neighbour while robbing a "Silver-Smith's" (269), Moll deceitfully explains in defense of herself that she had "call'd aloud with my Voice" (270) to alert the smith to her presence in his shop. Ironically, when Moll is finally and irrevocably taken in the act of stealing by two maids, they "bully'd and roar'd as if they would have murther'd me . . ." (272): she is "cried" (128), and, in a way, returned to her rightful "Owner" (128), the Bailiff of Newgate, not however by "a Man of Virtue and upright Principles" (128), but rather by servant women whom Moll regards as stupidly, cruelly vengeful.[20]

Imprisoned in Newgate, terrified and in a measure reflective, she is instructed and encouraged for the first time to take upon herself an acknowledgement of her sinfulness--as opposed to a self-incriminating "full Discovery" of her crime, which the treacherous "Ordinary" (277) of Newgate asks of her: she "hid nothing" from her

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[20]Neither maid will relent in her prosecution despite their mistress's "Compassion" (277) for Moll, and, when one of them is offered one hundred pounds not to testify against their victim, "she was so resolute, that tho' she was but a Servant Maid, at 3l. a Year Wages or thereabouts, she refus'd it . . ." (276). Furthermore, the women's testimony in the Old Bailey is exaggerated (264). But the relative enormity of Moll's attempted theft of "Brocaded Silk, very rich" (272), valued at forty-six pounds (284), might, considering the women's poverty in their servitude, contribute to their excessive fury. Such a motive, born out of hardship as well as envy, would not excuse, but would suggest a sympathetic and intelligent account, of the maids' behavior; it is a mitigating circumstance for the judicious reader to consider.

disinterested "Minister" (288). Significantly, she has already displayed a sense of responsibility for Jemy's crimes on seeing him led into the "Press-Yard" of Newgate:

> dreadful Creature, that I am, said I, How many poor People have I made Miserable? How many desperate Wretches have I sent to the Devil; This Gentleman's Misfortunes I plac'd all to my own Account . . .. (280)

Moll's spiritual and womanly welfare depends on her initiative to engage in sincere, humble self-confession, as well as in her willingness to feelingly submit to male attendance. Moll must repent of her secretive self-possession to achieve the paradox of active passivity, of Pauline, voluntary subjugation. Her passionate weeping on her self-disclosure to Jemy--". . . I threw off my Hood, and bursting out into Tears, my Dear, says I, do you not know me?" (297)--and to her son Humphrey--"we cry'd over one another a considerable while" (333-4)--signals Moll's penitent, normalized sensibility and will in relation to her men-folk.

Moll, who fabricates and extemporizes incessantly, comprehends neither moral truth, verbal testimony, nor visible signs until the time that she is subject to the performative power of juridical language. She obtusely misreads or miscalculates the dispositions and fortunes of her prospective husbands, thereby contradicting her own prudent/pretentious advice to unmarried women:

> the Lives of very few Men now a-Days will bear a Character; and if the Ladies do but make a little Enquiry, they will soon be able to distinguish the Men, and deliver themselves . . .. (75)

And Moll ignores the import of the experiences which point to the increasing likelihood of her arrest and execution as a thief: she was, she admits, "not at all made Cautious by my former Danger . . ." (272). But when "The Judges . . . Pronounc'd the Sentence of Death upon" (286) her, she is moved to repentance; their merciful reprieve of her death sentence, accomplished through the reasoned intercession of the Minister, and which he enters "in the Books" to show "to the Sheriffs" (290), initiates her life with Jemy "as a new People in a new World" (304). The operation of judgement and mercy, incorporated in the male word of the English court, and Moll's inspiration to live as a feminine penitent; cognizant of her loving obligation to her husband, the father of one of her sons, and to her son/nephew, her "only Child" (333), is mimetic of, even as Moll perceives it to be derived from, the transforming powers of the divine (God the Father, God the Son . . .) purpose.

Moll is a whore and a thief, a grateful, tearful penitent, and revels in her final good fortune. She is an agent of sexual and material deception, an abject sinner, and a miraculously rewarded penitent. In some ways the remarkable variety of her autobiography traces the propensities and destinies of Biblical women. The Jewish Bible, for instance, is rife with examples of eccentric feminine allegiances: Sarah and Rebecca pose as their husbands' sisters; Leah is substituted for her sister Rachel on Jacob's wedding night; Tamar poses as a prostitute to

secure the line of her father-in-law Judah, and to embarrass him for his failure to designate her to his youngest son; Rebecca, to benefit her younger but favourite son Jacob with his father's inheritance, deceives her blind husband Isaac. In the Gospel According to St. John, on the other hand, women, especially sexually impure women, are agents of recognition and receivers of merciful revelation: like the woman of Samaria, who is moved to public proselytizing, Moll has had five husbands--and yet, like the Samaritan, at the time of her conversion, she has no husband, and Moll goes on to publish her conviction of her god's glory. Moll comes to resemble the woman caught in adultery, chastened, absolved, her life saved by Jesus. And her surprising encounter with her long lost son Humphrey recalls Mary Magdalen's bitter-sweet meeting with her risen savior: "you may guess, if you can, what a confus'd mixture of Joy and Fright possest my Thoughts upon this Occasion, for I immediately knew that this was no Body else, but my own Son . . ." (321). Moll bears no resemblance, however, despite the panegyric of Jemy, the charming nonentity, on the seemingly perfunctory abundance with which they have been blessed in America, to Job's wife. She confesses and shares her wealth with Jemy, telling him that

> 'I Brought over with me for the use of our Plantation, three Horses with Harness, and Saddles; some Hogs, two Cows, and a thousand other things . . . that my Mother had left me such a Plantation, and that he [Humphrey] had preserv'd it for me . . . he would render me a faithful Account of its Produce; and then I pull'd him out the hundred Pound in Silver, as the first Years produce, and then pulling

> out the Deer skin Purse, with the Pistoles, and here my Dear, says I, is the [money which more than compensates for her lost] gold Watch, My Husband, so is Heavens' goodness sure to work the same Effects, in all sensible Minds, where Mercies touch the Heart, lifted up both his Hands, and with an extasy of Joy, What is God a doing, says he, for such an ungrateful Dog as I am!' (339)

Moll's satisfaction in gaining her entitled property and in multiplying her treasure is deflated by the expression of her husband's merely nominal faith in God. Moll need only apply for what is hers by right--to seek and therefore to find--to happily fulfill her feminine obligation to her family and its estate.

Feminist socialists must locate and expose the ideological constructions concerning gender and class in literature, for the praxis--the subtly rendered concatenation of incident in Defoe's narrative, for instance--is often convincing, poignant, and compelling. Defoe portrays hierarchies as necessary; he explains social restiveness and individual criminality by defining their relation to the psychology of fallen humanity. In Moll Flanders, the battle against the prevalent danger of sinful rebellion depends upon the active vigilance and interpretation of every detail of every aspect of contemporary life--a woman's careless placement of diamond rings on a window sill; the tea table gossip that an unknown woman is a fortune; the particular steps in the gradual process from strict chastity to fornication. This absorption in and criticism of minute points of living is a telling indication of the practical means and ideological intent of

eighteenth-century bourgeois men to expand and consolidate their power. Defoe's fiction posits that interfering instruction should coincide with philanthropic intervention into the lives of women and the lower orders, and that institutions should be infused with the effort to maintain distinctions. Significantly, Defoe contributes to the discourse which institutionalizes literature in his lobby for copyright protection. He seeks to define literary products as property;[21] by this means, writers would enter Locke's category of those entitled to constitutional protection. Defoe therefore in this instance shifts from a concern for the moral reform of others to the need for a political reform which would uphold the rights of men--women and servants not being persons, of course--to life, liberty, and property.[22] In the meantime, according to the intricate relationship between public peace and domestic order which is drawn in Moll Flanders, the lower classes, and women of

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[21]Defoe, The Review VI, 363. Quoted in Bell, 33-34. Defoe protests literary piracy, observes Bell, because it threatens "his professional status" and "his income": "The Practice is the Shame and Scandal of the Present Time--and gives a Liberty to daily Invasions of Property equal in villainy to robbing a House, or plundering an Hospital. Nor is this all; it is a Discouragement to Industry, a Dishonour to Learning, and a Cheat upon the Whole Nation. By this Practice, a Man, who had study'd several Years to perform the most elaborate Work; and perhaps been at 500l. Charge to print it, besides all other Pains, and to whom such a Work might otherwise be an Inheritance, and to his Family, has his Labour destroy'd, his Expenses lost, and his copy re-printed by pyratical Booksellers and Printers, who eat the Gain of the poor Man's Labour, destroy and spoil the Work itself, cheat the Buyer by performing it imperfect, and ruin the laborious Author."

[22]"To Locke a man's labour is unquestionably his own property. . . ." C. B. MacPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962) 215.

all classes, are unalterably subject.

## III. 'How times are alter'd!'; or, The more things change the more they stay the same: The illusion of feminine and class discourse in Pamela

Pamela[1] includes a remarkable (and remarkably familiar) paradigm of the operation of liberal discourse; that is to say, the apparently plastic rhetorical structures and verbal exchanges of the novel seem to allow for feminine and class dissent, but the criticism of social mechanisms engendered by the ductility of Richardson's epistolary form is obscured by the novel's broad intention to conserve the legitimacy of social hierarchies: the appropriation of power by the dominant culture, the male gentry, is thereby maintained. In a brilliantly anti-subversive tactic, the power of the novel's squirearchy is preserved by Richardson's expansion of the reading culture's rhetorical scope to include the sharp opinions of an adolescent waiting maid. The heroine's vividly colloquial, idiosyncratic wit, musings, and schemes, the most entertaining narrative elements of the novel, are arranged to subdue her. By falling in love with and marrying Pamela, Mr. B., the tormenting squire turned model husband, easily assumes the absolute authority over the heroine's mind and body which eludes him when he merely demands it; her physical presence and single-minded, forthright judgement madden him until he incorporates her into his family bed and board, and can rely on her redundant,

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[1]Samuel Richardson, Pamela, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton, 1971). All further references will be to this text.

guileless testimony of his noblesse oblige. The feminine and class protests against the master's tyranny (for Pamela's literary labourer-father pleads for his daughter, and so do her fellow servants) are only a pathetic reaction to Mr. B.'s temporary breach of ethics. Pamela acquiesces to the propriety and demands of the squirearchy, and that class is persuaded to accept her, and her rise in station, because of her apparently extraordinarily unconventional submissiveness to the utterly conventional dictates of her parents and her God, and, finally, to the experimental domestic economy of her Master-Husband. The whole truth of Pamela's thoughts, intentions, and actions are documented in her letters and journal addressed to her parents; this self-regarding private text becomes, however, the heroine's public testimony, as well as a symbol, of her chaste sexual body. Her body is subject to unwanted interference, kidnapping, forcible confinement, and attempted rape; similarly, despite illicit readings, buryings, robberies, and searchings, the text remains intact, and its integrity is preserved. Furthermore, Pamela, naturally favoured, and exceptionally educated, publicly complies with private domestic requirements of feminine gentility other than resolute virgin maidenhood--she sings, dances, carves, and embroiders for the pleasure and edification of all who view her--so that the genteel class can understand her, and Mr. B. can "know" her.

The art of the heroine-speaker's moral rhetoric ("And what is left me but Words?" [182]) elicits sympathy for the cause of just treatment of servant girls within well-regulated households: "For you see by my sad Story, and narrow Escapes, what Hardships poor Maidens go thro', whose Lot is to go out to Service; especially to Houses where there is not the fear of God, and good Rule kept by the Heads of Family" (73). Pamela calls as well for the bestowal of charity upon the worthy poor ("such honest, Industrious Poor, as may be true Objects of Charity" [387]). Finally, the heroine makes a case for the tolerance of those unique occasions when the squire marries his marvellously literate and morally pure handmaiden: she is "as witty as any Lady in the Land" (54), and is, she is told, "an sweet exemplar for all my Sex" (339). Mr. B. indeed teases her that she is "well read, I see; and we shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty Story in Romance, I warrant ye!" (42) The advocacy of these tame social doctrines is not the real work of the novel, however; Pamela, identifying the exemplary lady with the ideal dependence and abjectness of the servant class, perpetuates the institution of gentle female sexual bondage. Pamela's "Papers" (387) comprise a guide book about a sexually uninitiated woman not for the sexual discipline of lascivious men, but for the humbling of wilful women. Mr. B. coyly excuses his "Confinement" of Pamela as being the paradoxical time "when she was taken Prisoner, in order to make me one" (267), and is easily

pardoned for impregnating Sally Godfrey, whose mother is blamed for the sexual indiscretion. Miss Godfrey is a lady "of a good Family, and the Flower of it: But that her Mother was a Person of great Art and Address, and not altogether so nice in the Particular", of Mr. B.'s relation to her daughter, "as she ought to have been" (394). Lady Davers, Mr. B.'s proud, clamorous sister, is included in the novel as an instructively comic example of a good lady in need of a strong male hand. Her weak husband lacks mastery over her (a presumptuous letter to Mr. B. is of his sister's "Penning," he reckons, but her husband, "poor Man, is the humble Copier" [278]) and her foppish nephew ("a sad Coxcomb" [333]) suffers her abuse. She ends cheerfully admitting that her brother has succeeded in setting her pride "a good many Pegs lower than I ever knew it..." (363). Even Lady Davers comes to acknowledge Pamela as a model of virtue, as a "Subject" (362) of praise. Although the feminine essence of Pamela's natural gentility is mysterious, the link between her rigidly defined conduct as a married woman and universal social improvement is rhetorically clear. Even the editor's "Preface"--where Richardson, in a quixotic double entendre, boasts that "desirable Ends are obtained in these Sheets" (3)--and concluding "Observations" (409), belabour, in a didactic extension of the heroine's reiterative style, the thrust of the reforming social code represented in the novel; that is to say, if the wives and daughters of gentlemen are imbued,

like Pamela, with the humility of honest yet clever drudges, and behave, like her, as mindful yet elegant upper servants to their lords and masters, the nation will benefit from the selective benevolence and social harmony somehow radiating from the chaste female centres on Eng[illegible] country estates. Reverend William Webster indeed beg[illegible]hardson to "give us Pamela for the benefit of Mankind..." (8). This social philosophy is based, not on sympathetic eroticism, but on the ideology of exploitation.

Pamela in effect uses the essential moral and intellectual egalitarianism of Richardson's contemporary ideological currency, against the feminine poor. The potentially discomforting praxis of many Lockean assumptions to those dominating the class and sexual hierarchy is revised so that satisfyingly moral, intellectual--and sexual--appearances and products (like Pamela's letters, sayings, and beauteous self) are harvested and added to the stores of the controlling class. Richardson expresses in a letter to his friend Stinstra the Lockean contention that "men and women are not of different species; and what need be obtained to Know both, but to allow for different Modes of Education/(or /Situation[])...."[2] But Richardson's belief in psychic equivalence between genders, and his concern with "character," is in Pamela in conflict with the exigencies of the "environment" ordered by a squirearchy. As one critic

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[2]William C. Slattery, ed., The Richardson-Stinstra Correspondence and Stinstra's Prefaces to Clarissa (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969) 71.

drily remarks, while the power of "verbal argument and criticism" may be inherent and universal, and although "Anyone may claim this authority, ... it is not usually part of a servant's role to do so."[3] On the other hand, someone must recall Mr. B. to himself. For according to Pickering's interpretation of eighteenth-century thought, "In the ideal Lockean world, no person would inherit prestige or power but would be educated to assume it. Attaining not simply position but also proper morality depended upon education and work, not privilege."[4] Pamela must bear the burden of Mr. B.'s intemperate character (not to mention his latter-day sanctimony and exalted intentions), and then demurely glory in the responsibility for reforming it. Mr. B. whets his already keen appetite for coitus by playing the Peeping Tom; he reads her private correspondence to fuel his resentment against her intransigent virginity and to advance his plots against her. Pamela's unconscious, titillating striptease, and her unconscious written confessions to her enemy are the means to the end of Mr. B.'s "education," of his acknowledgement, and conviction that he should take manly charge, of the sincerity of Pamela's chaste desires. He is checked in his sexual assaults by her naked "Fits" (67, 177), and, ultimately, checked in his harrassments altogether by her "mournful Relation" (208) of her

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[3]Ivor Indyk, "Interpretive Relevance, and Richardson's Pamela," Southern Review 16, No. 1 (March, 1983): 37.
[4]Samuel Pickering, Jr., "'The Ambiguous Circumstances of a Pamela': Early Children's Books and the Attitude towards Pamela," Journal of Narrative Technique 14, No. 3 (Fall, 1984): 154.

temptation to suicide and by her consequent moral reflections recorded in the letters he has extorted from her. Pamela thus re-directs the estimable squire; she makes her rapist fit to penetrate and to govern her ("The rake is dead, long live the reformed rake") for the good of everyone. After her marriage, Pamela, a miracle of virtue, is subject to the arbitrary rule--and "Rules" (369)--of a husband (she says of the first of his forty-eight "awful" [369] directives, "...I'll remember it, I warrant, But yet I fancy this Rule is almost peculiar to himself" [369]). Pamela's pre-marital dilemma--her quick eye and ear for pomposity, and her obligation to passively accede to the restrictions of her place--persists within the context of her marriage, and is not resolved by protest, but by good-humoured self-mockery. Pamela is, for instance, diverted rather than offended by the Griselda-like fortitude required of her by Mr. B.; she pleasantly remarks of Rule #30, like a good sport, and not a sycophant--for slavishness would be in contradiction of Rule #25--that the content of the injunction "would bear a smart Debate, I fansy, in a Parliament of Women" (271). Pamela must not only eat humble pie; she must eat with relish. The paradoxical life of married women constructed in the novel is not explored; to probe the feelings of such a woman would be to explode the comfortable principles upon which the fiction is based.

Pamela is not raped, but her body text is in a manner prostituted by prurient, leisured lookers/readers.

Richardson's novel seems to be largely taken up with the suspense of foreplay. Indeed, the banal repetitiveness of incident and exclamatory phrasing in Pamela is characteristic of pornography: even after the rituals of salaciousness, hysteria, and contrivances which lead to the heroine's climactic wedding night ("this happy, yet awful Moment" [295]), the novel goes on to include multiple spasms of familiar delight as Pamela is presented and re-presented for the rapturous approval of the Lincolnshire gentry and servants, the Bedfordshire servants, gentry, and tenants, and finally, for that of her own parents, when they behold her, as everyone else has, transformed and marvellously exalted as a sexually initiated yet still poor but "honest" (33) woman. Pamela describes Mr. B.'s generosity to her as though it involved her in a domestic paradox derivative of a Biblical one; using the familiar words of a saved sinner, she says she finds herself, having been given money to distribute among the Bedfordshire servants, "to be so costly and so worthless!" (381) The equation in the novel of the mysteries of religious experience with Pamela's rise in station through marriage deflects from the self-objectification and degradation of the heroine, and justifies the squelching of her pointed, imaginative insights as she gives way to the self-congratulatory, sanctified higher authority of her master. After her marriage, Pamela has nothing left to say, but "thank you" to God and Mr. B. for all that has happened to her; her letters

historicize her, rendering her virgin self a delicious artifact, and make any further original, feminine ruminations unnecessary. And the letters are, besides, proof of God's saving grace, of "Virtue Rewarded" ("Titlepage" [1]); as such, they assume the status of devotional literature. Where Pamela suggests to her parents that they bestow upon "kind" "Farmer Jones... three Guineas worth of good Books, such as a Family-Bible, a Common-Prayer, a Whole Duty of Man, or any other you think will be acceptable..." (391), she agrees to let Lady Davers disseminate her truncated journal (388) amongst her husband and a select group of fashionable "Intimates" (377). The readers of Pamela's writings vicariously behold her--the letters are private, and no more meant for the eyes and ears of any but her parents, than her words and body are meant to be heard or espied by Pamela's prying, eavesdropping "naughty Master" (112) as he hides behind screens, or in closets, or in disguise in Pamela's bed-chamber; they view her from within their closets or drawing rooms as Pamela's feelings and attitudes are exposed, and as she lingers over the details of her appearance half-naked, or in rustic dress, or enclothed in silk and satin. Finally, of course, the letters are presented for public consumption: the novel is meant to be "profitable to the younger Class of Readers as well as worthy of the Attention of Persons of maturer Years and Understandings..." ("Preface" [3]).

As for Mr. B., happily in possession of Pamela as a bedfellow, and assured of her lovingly changed perspective of him as it is written down and otherwise publicized--as, in other words, her sexual history is repeated and institutionalized--he no longer needs, on their return to the "Library" (385) in his house on his estate in Bedfordshire, to which he has returned for the first time since leaving it after his mother's death, to lewdly and absurdly gawk at, and to maul and bully, the preening servant girl and companion of his late mother. Rather, he blissfully--post-coitally, as it were--and surreptitiously regards his wife, the new mistress of the house, on her knees at prayer, thanking God, she says, "for the differences I now found to what I had once known" (385) in that room. Past episodes, including Mr. B.'s bad actions, assume the status of cherished relics within the heroine's consciousness, and, therefore, within her text. That is to say, Pamela views the events of her past anachronistically as she becomes a proponent of a different order of meaning when she encounters places and people in her "enlightened" frame of mind--as she is admittedly engrossed in contemplating Mr. B.'s virtues and in broadcasting his ideas of virtue. After her betrothal, the subjective quality of Pamela's perception is obliterated as the scenes of her indignity and distress become, as it were, sanctified places for which she should be grateful. Pamela and her father, walking in the garden of Lincolnshire estate, "go over every

Scene of it, that had before been so dreadful to me! The Fish-pond, the Back-door, and every Place: O what Reason had we for Thankfulness and Gratitude!" (254). Similarly, on her arrival as a married woman at the Bedfordshire estate, Pamela goes with Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, "and in every Room, the Chamber I took refuge in, when my master pursu'd me, my Lady's Chamber, her Dressing-room, Mrs. Jervis's Room, not forgetting her Closet, my own little Bed-chamber, the Green-room, and in each of the others, I kneeled down severally, and blessed God for my past Escapes, and present Happiness..." (378). Mr. and Mrs. Andrews (Pamela's "careful, but loving Father and Mother" [28]), by the evidence of the father's reception when he comes to be reunited with his betrothed daughter in Lincolnshire, and by means of the continual rhapsodies of Pamela's letters, are initiated in the mysterious and bountiful ways of Mr. B., and, thus converted from their earlier conviction that he is an "evil" (38) man, can gratefully release Pamela from their homely parental sway to the grace and might of the squire. Pamela's journal of her trials before her professed love elicits the emotional response of a spiritual autobiography; her sexual adventure assumes the affect of religious profundity. John Andrews in fact, having witnessed Mr. B.'s condescension to her, implores Pamela "tho' your father be here," to "write to your Mother, that this wondrous Story be perfect, and we, your Friends, may read and admire you more and more" (255). Pamela's own father concedes Mr. B.'s

sexual persecutions as the prelude to her social elevation, and regards her recording of the particulars of her domestic glorification as an inspirational and improving project. The squire's cruel exploitation, once softened, is disregarded; he is not blameworthy, but rather his assaults and kidnapping are obliquely condoned, and even fetishized, within Pamela's gushing, redundant text.

The heroine's progress from the idiomatic piety ("God, whose Graciousness to us we have so often experienc'd at a Pinch..."[25]) and ingenuous prudence (evident in her description of her safe-guarding of a package containing "Four golden Guineas," which she sends to her parents tightly wrapped "that it mayn't chink" [26]) revealed in the novel's first charming letter, to the pretty, correct phrasing in expressing anxiety to be an exemplary domestic steward (Mrs. B. is concerned that her money for charity is as yet unspoken for: "The money lies by me, and brings me no Interest. You see I am become a mere Usurer; and want to make Use upon Use..." [408]) which typifies the very last letter in Pamela, is, ideologically, circular, although schematically Pamela moves upwards on the social scale. She writes first out of childish duty, and finally to effect her wifely obligations. Pamela stops writing about herself to her parents when she is "settl'd," and they "determin'd" (387): then, "she had no Occasion to continue her Journal longer" (408). Instead, acting as her lord's intermediary, she sets about to transcribe, in "a Vellum-book of all white

Paper" (387), her carefully considered gifts of Mr. B.'s money to the worthy poor, to "true Objects of Charity" (387); she ends, that is, as a recording angel, an angel of mercy, of the house. But in between Pamela's eager, innocent service to Lady B. and her tremulously satisfied married state to her mistress' son, Pamela is spirited away and tormented by Mr. B. and his agents, and she writes for her own ends. She addresses her parents, but, she says, "scribbles" for solace ("now it is all the Diversion I have" [106]), while, by her secret "Sun-Flower Correspondence" (128) with Mr. Williams the minister, she hopes to save herself from Mr. B. However, her imaginative observations and her adventurous schemes for escape ("I have read of a great Captain, who... escaped and triumphed over them all" [149])--her literary invention and imitation--are futile in the short term, and useful in the long term only because Mr. B. reads about them and falls in love with her. Pamela is morally right in her steadfast battles against his lame wit and preposterous claims. She is obeying the call to the fierce pride of chastity instilled in her by her parents, who would actually rather see her dead than "dishonest" (27): "Arm yourself, my dear Child, for the worst; and resolve to lose your life sooner than your Virtue" (32). Therefore, that Pamela is repeatedly chastened for her judgements and her feelings signals not only that the independently formed point of view of the young, isolated, resourceful but self-taught feminine servant is deficient,

but also that the resistant maiden, though pathetic in her distress, deserves her sufferings. The sacrifice of her pride, the contempt for her body and psyche, allow for his moral enlightenment and her own eventual bliss. Pamela is a feminine martyr, pure yet sinful, tortured yet blessed. The rhetorical use of religious pattern in the depiction of the heroine's sentimental progress obfuscates a misogynic logic whereby Pamela must endure endless humiliation, and then be grateful. Her position is precarious and culpable until she marries and submits.

The heroine is subject to paradoxes and punishments which all tend to exempt the squire from censure. For instance, Mr. B.'s responsibility for Pamela's suffering is diminished, if not erased, by the morally contrary rhetorical contiguity which exists between them. Pamela perceives in her Master an evil mind and will: he is "cunning as Lucifer" (61), "an implement... in the Hands of Lucifer" (86), and "Lucifer in the Shape of my Master" (181). On the other hand, he has the form and countenance of an "angel" (31). Pamela hates the Lucifer, and loves the Angel: "O what an Angel would he be in my Eyes yet, if he would cease his Attempts, and reform" (157). Mr. B. accuses her, curiously, of complying with the terms of a Biblical exhortation: he says she is "as innocent as a Dove" and as "cunning as a Serpent" (125).[5] His articulation of her paradoxical stance towards him is accurately reflected in

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[5]Matthew 10:16.

her ambivalent verbal descriptions (Lucifer/Angel) of him. By this contrivance, he, like her, is a devilish innocent. Their reciprocal feelings are falsely equated with their disparate moral performances, with his criminal intent and her determined self-defense.

Moreover, Pamela is guilty in the very defiance of her Master which is meant to be her chief glory as a Christian servant: when she suffers indignity and physical battering in her struggle to maintain her sexual innocence, the text makes clear that she nonetheless merits her pain and humiliation for having absorbed Mr. B.'s attention. Having rejected her late lady's finery, given to her by Mr. B., to appear, in anticipation of her independence from his household and attempts at seduction, in new but simple clothes she has bought for herself, he accuses her of assuming a "Disguise" (62). Significantly, he later disguises his own self as Nan the servant woman to gain an easy place in Pamela's bed, so that he can commit rape; perhaps this dastardly scheme against Pamela is inspired by herself, by her earlier surprising change to a humble maid's costume which moves him to sexually assault her. In any case, Mr. B., angry when Pamela, dressed in her rustic clothes, will not succumb to him, assaults her; she complains that "he made my Arm black and blue; for the Marks are upon it still" (62). Mrs. Jervis afterwards explains to Pamela that the heroine is to some extent a blameworthy party in this incident: "you owe some of your Danger to the

lovely Appearance you made" (66). Further, responsibility for the squire's cruelty is consistently transferred to the figure approximating Pamela's status, the woman servant (only think of Mr. B. in poor Nan's clothes). So good Mrs. Jervis initiates, though not intentionally, Mr. B.'s attack on Pamela by her officious introduction of the girl in her new costume: Pamela "did not thank her for this..." (61). The Master is provoked at all times by Pamela's beauty and by the tacit encouragement of his housekeepers, who are Pamela's "bedfellows" (38, 104), to sexually torment her. Many of his outrages are committed through the agency of Mrs. Jewkes, his less scrupulous, less gentle Lincolnshire housekeeper. Pamela suffers an injurious blow at the hands of Mrs. Jewkes within the context of a more vehement rejection of Mr. B.'s freedom to possess her, than a symbolic change of clothes. She demands to know

> how came I to be his Property? What Right has he in me, but such as a Thief may plead to stolen Goods?--Why, was the like heard, says she [Mrs. Jewkes]!--This is downright Rebellion....(116)

As Pamela then objects to Mrs. Jewkes' suggestion that she be raped by her Master, something he later does attempt, with Mrs. Jewkes' blessing and collusiveness, her use of the epithet "Jezebel" (116) incurs a "deadly Slap" (116) from Mrs. Jewkes. Pamela, distracted from her main intention, a justifiable rhetorical attack, instead privately accedes to the accusation of imprudence/impudence ("Malapertness" [116]): "I blam'd myself for my free Speech, for now I had given her some Pretence..." (116). She also blames herself

for being tricked out of her money by Mrs. Jewkes: "my Folly ... was the worst of all; for that depriv'd me of my Money..." (157). The abuse of sexual and class dominance accountable to the squire is initiated, it seems, by women, insofar as they are unthinking, or crude, or young and lovely. Mr. B.'s feminine upper servants, Pamela included, are obedient but lacking in foresight and improving sense. In the end, the heroine is altogether removed from the imperfect care and influence of any woman: her Lady is dead, and, as Mr. B.'s humble wife, she becomes the new lady-housekeeper of both Mr. B.'s estates, and he takes the place of the protective Mrs. Jervis (who is a "Mother" [33] to Pamela) and the tyrannic Mrs. Jewkes beside Pamela in bed. Pamela nevertheless remains a quivering yet stalwart "Servant" (257) to Mr. B., while he assumes his new place as a judicious and sympathetic lord over all.

The propriety and inevitability of this arrangement is confirmed after their marriage when the proud, scolding, even indecent Lady Davers arrives. Her history of spiteful impetuosity and petty violence at once echoes her brother's former wilful vulgarity ("...I never undrest a Girl in my Life; but I will now begin to strip my pretty Pamela" [204]) and aggression ("You see, now you are in my Power!--You cannot get from me, nor help yourself..." [176]), and provides the squire occasions to manifest his superior force and virtue as he defends Pamela and the sanctity of his marriage against the disgraceful, unlawful incursions of--a

lady, his elder sister, also known, he says, for her piety, charity, and love for him (341). That is to say, the incidents of Lady Davers' hysterical conduct and its effect on Pamela is a tempest in a teapot which comically repeats the heroine's earlier, more profound predicament with Mr. B. The great lady's verbal abuse cannot wound like Mr. B.'s, because Pamela is not her servant, and her violence matches neither Mr. B.'s soul-threatening assaults nor Mrs. Jewkes' powerful blows; Pamela quite easily escapes her gentle tormentor. Lady Davers is an intruder not so much on Pamela's person and social place, as on her brother's inherited space--the house they were both born in, but from which, if she displeases him, he can, with perfect right, evict her. He has unjustly chosen to incarcerate the servant Pamela in the same house; however, he is angry to think that she does not leave it as his wife, at his bidding, to join him at Sir Simon's to dine. The sister's behaviour may be peremptory and wild, but it is no match for virile prerogative and force. And while the servant girl Pamela rouses Mr. B.'s lust, and his housekeepers exacerbate his desire for unlawful dominance of her, his sister now stirs his righteous indignation. So Pamela is once again confined against her will (Lady Davers gives her "a Push, and pull'd a Chair, and setting the Back against the Door, sat down on it" [319]), subject to verbal insults ("Wenches and Creatures out of number" [337]) and physical abuse ("She gave me a Slap on the Hand" [325]), and broken in upon and

frightened in her own bed ("Bear witness... the Creature is now in his Bed" [344]). In another instance of a replication of the heroine's previous experience which has the effect of heightening her solidarity with her former persecutors, Lady Davers seizes Pamela's hand, something Mrs. Jewkes has done earlier (175) to facilitate Mr. B.'s intended rape. But Lady Davers neither intends nor is capable of anything so wicked, and Mrs. Jewkes is now Pamela's ally:

> Mrs. Jewkes said to me, Madam, may I speak one Word with you?--I can't tell, Mrs. Jewkes, said I; for my Lady holds my Hand, and you see I am a kind of Prisoner. (321)

Mr. B. goes on to react and perform correctly and admirably, protecting his wife and taming his shrewish sister. For Pamela's part, her vocal, and athletic, determination to demonstrate her loyalty to her husband's wishes is sanctioned: she is praised for holding her own against the animadversions of Lady Davers and her party, and for escaping out of a window to go to the Darnfords' dinner as instructed by her Master ("they seem'd highly pleas'd with my Relation" [341]). But her interjectional entreaty to Mr. B. on behalf of another woman, his own sister, is forbidden:

> May I, Sir, said I, beg all your Anger on myself, and to be reconciled to your good Sister? Presuming Pamela! reply'd he, and made me start, art thou then so hardy, so well able to sustain a Displeasure, which, of all things, I expected, from thy Affection and thy Tenderness, thou wouldst have wished to avoid? (359)

Pamela is responsible solely to her husband and his concerns; she is to consider only her own actions and welfare and how these reflect upon him: no questions asked.

Her judgement and her mercy are not to operate independently of him. This complete subjugation to his will and purpose is commanded by him and undertaken by her in the manner of a secular covenant--where his "Rules" (369) assume for her the status of law: Mr. B. articulates, in other words, a reductive Pauline theology. Moreover, he describes Pamela as though she were part of a wifely elect: even during his rakish period, he concedes that "indeed, every Lady is not a Pamela" (202). After their wedding, he asserts that Pamela possesses the attributes of a "Lady . . . naturally; they are born with her" (350). Her rise to magnificence through marriage to him is, it seems, meant to be.

The subject of Pamela's lowly status is a constant--monotonous--but misleading refrain throughout the novel: she is quick to point out to Lady Davers that she is no "beggarly Brat," for her parents "were once in a very creditable Way . . . " (328). And the editor regards Mr. and Mrs. Andrews as "Examples" of the providential tendency to restore the righteous "who are reduced to a low Estate" (140). Pamela, that is, to a large extent, and in the fashion of romance, only recovers what has been lost to her. Richardson by no means advocates anything but a marginal readjustment of the class structure. It is not that Pamela is worthy, through moral and gentle education, unusual beauty, and delightful, nimble-witted intelligence alone, of receiving supererogatory social benefits: her innately gentle feminine temperament and original class position

("methinks I can't bear to be look'd upon by these Men-servants" [30] she remarks fastidiously, and prophetically, early on) are God-given, and her conferred status as a gentle wife is theologically necessary. Mr. B. assumes the part of a many-faced divine agent, the heroine's Tempter, Savior, and Law-Giver, who ensures that God's will is done. However, the price of Pamela's fortunate new position, and the price that Richardson sets for his lady readers if they will be good wives, is that she must rejoice within a humiliating conceptualization of her place. Her spiritual and social self are to be mediated through a man she acknowledges as having god-like significance. Pamela replies to Mr. B.'s initially proposed sexual contract, his "naughty Articles" (207), that she "will make no Free-will offering" of her "Virtue" (166); she later remarks that "Love is not a volunteer Thing" (214). She distinguishes between the imperatives of moral will and feeling. Yet though her heart compels her to love Mr. B., he demands her love as a moral necessity: he justifies his marriage to a servant on the grounds that "I so much value a voluntarie Love, in the Person I would wish for my Wife" (231). The squire here echoes the exacting, contradictory desires of Milton's God as explained by Raphael: "Our voluntarie love he requires"[1]: only a free conformity will satisfy Mr. B. Pamela obligingly perceives her relation to Mr. B. as

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[1]John Milton, Paradise Lost, in Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey P, 1957) Book V, l. 529.

comparable to that between a human soul and the divine:

> For it must be always a Sign of a poor Condition to receive Obligations one cannot repay; as it is of a rich Mind, when it can confer them, without expecting or needing a Return. It is, on one side, the State of the human Creature compar'd, on the other, to the Creator; and so, with due Deference, may be said to be God-like. . . . (233)

The betrothed virgin goes so far as to identify herself "with the blessed Virgin": "My soul doth magnify the Lord; for he hath regarded the low Estate of his Handmaiden,--and exalted one of low Degree" (263). Later, writing about the occasion of her wedding, Pamela thanks God that Mr. B. "has thus exalted his unworthy Servant" (290).

The rhetorical equation of sexual love and religious [illegible]tation is presaged in the heroine's celebrated autobiographical prolmody (267-71), and can be further prognosticated from the parallel which is drawn between her fear of rape and her sin of despair. Pamela is punished for both states of mind, as though they were one; her chastening, improving pain makes her willing to mistrust both her worldly and her moral judgement and prepares her to accept Mr. B. as a real and adorable lover. Having recognized her temptation to suicide by drowning in "the Pond" (149) as sinful, Pamela harshly reprimands herself: "because wicked Men persecute thee, wilt thou fly in the Face of the Almighty, and bid Defiance to his Grace and Goodness, who can still turn all these Sufferings to thy Benefits?" (153) Pamela's agonies are perceived as a blessing--and so, by implication, are Mr. B.'s cruelties.

There is in the heroine's spiritual crux a curious affiliation of her with the Passion and Resurrection of the Suffering Servant, Christ; only pain is, in effect self-inflicted by Pamela, rather than inflicted on her, in what amounts to a payment, an atonement, for her social advancement, which occurs through the relentless progress of the squire's enigmatic but tangibly manifest will. On the morning after Pamela's attempted escape, "Mrs. Ann," the lowly servant woman who has believed, like the rest of the household, that their special charge Pamela is dead, finds her injured body in the "Wood-house," and rejoices that "Now . . . you'll make us all alive again!" By living Pamela has saved them from B.'s merciless wrath. But Pamela has, unlike Christ, needed herself to experience deliverance, not from [illegible], or rather, in a telling, typical distinction between the squire and his lackeys, not "from my wicked Keepers, and my designing Master" (154), but "from a worse Enemy, myself!" (154) She learns the futility and danger of her pride, of a "vain dependence on my own foolish Contrivances" (153). When Pamela's imaginative scheme--inspired by a storybook (149)--to escape, which culminates in an attempt to climb over the garden wall, fails, she found, she says, "I had bruis'd my left Hip and Shoulder, and was full of Pain with it; and besides my Head bled, and ak'd . . . " (151), After her terrible Fall in the Master's "Garden" (149), Pamela, she says, "began . . . to repent of my Attempt, which I now censur'd as rash," not yet

because she thinks it "presumptuous," but "because it did not succeed" (151). She in retrospect regards herself as lucky in her injuries; they slow her movement, and so ultimately deter her from her ill-considered suicide: "It was well for me, as I have since thought, that I was so maimed, as made me the longer before I got to the Water; for this gave me some Reflection" (151). So although she, says she, was "once rising, so indulgent was I to this sad way of thinking, to throw myself in," she says that her "Bruises made me slow" (152). Her battering saves her, body and soul. Pamela ends her adventure that night utterly frustrated, with "a Mind just broken, and a Heart sensible to nothing but the extremest Woe and Dejection" (154). Like Jacob wrestling with the Angel, she injures her "Hip" in attempting to escape the will of a superior being, although her wounds are an apt but unavowed symbol of a confrontation with her Master's, not God's, power. So while the Squire's prerogative is first merely conceded, it is openly and tirelessly welcomed when it turns benign: Pamela regales her father with "Prattle, of my Master's Goodness, and my future Prospects," until Mr. Andrews "was transported with Joy; and went to bed, and dreamt of nothing but Jacob's Ladder, and Angels ascending and decending, to bless him, and his Daughter" (254).

Pamela does not again attempt an escape from Mr. B. Even when she has been given his permission to go home to her parents, she feels compelled to return to him at his

request-command:

> 'You cannot imagine the Obligation your Return will lay me under to your Goodness; and yet, if you will not so far favour me, you shall be under no Restraint. . . . But spare me, my dearest Girl, the Confusion of following you to your Father's; which I must do, if you persist to go on. . . .' (216)

Pamela left Mr. B. because she doubted his new-found tenderness for her; she suspects that he was arranging a "Sham-marriage" (209). She comes to rue her lack of faith in his professed intentions: "It has quite ruin'd me!" (214) Up to this point, "ruin" has signified, for Pamela, the loss of her chastity to Mr. B.; now, she regrets she is to be deprived of his reformed attentions. Either way, she is at a sore disadvantage. In a sort of just retribution for having left the squire in the first place, reminiscent of her early state after her first attempt to escape his sway, Pamela finds herself, on the morning after her long journey back to Lincolnshire, exhausted and "deadly sore all over, as if I had been soundly beaten" (219). This time, though, she finds also joy in the morning.

Pamela may be a martyr to Mr. B.'s contempt, but her verbal self-depreciation after their reconciliation reveals her complicity with his perception of her during the period before he avows his love: it is too good of him to ask for her forgiveness; she pardons him even by assimilating his initial contumeliousness towards her. Pamela is rhetorically astute enough to anticipate criticism; her development of this skill enables her to subjugate herself with zeal. Mr. B. derides his sprightly young servant as a ""Sawcebox"

(41); on another occasion, reporting one of her repartees, she cheerfully obviates the expression of this same judgement on the part of her parents: "Well, this was a little sawcy, you'll say" (63). Pamela begins with a talent for wise-cracks: when Mr. B. roars self-righteously that Pamela "makes herself an Angel of Light, and makes me, her kind Master and Benefactor, a Devil incarnate," Pamela parenthetically delivers a suitably caustic remark: "(O how people will sometimes, thought I, call themselves by the right Names!)" (45) But Pamela learns in time to eat Mr. B.'s words. He accuses her of being "a subtle artful Gypsey" (40); as it turns out, she goes on to regret the indiscretion of believing in a plot against her, supposedly devised by the squire, of which a Gypsy pretends to have knowledge. In another instance, Mr. B. chides Pamela as "a foolish Hussy" (35) for her fright at his encroachment upon her in the "Summer-house"; she comes to fondly bewail herself as such: "what a chargeable, what a worthless Hussy I am, to the dear gentleman!" (386) The heroine weeps at her Master's "Roughness" when he remarks that he does not "want idle Sluts to stay in my House" (55). Later, he employs the epithet not as an injurious pejorative but as a gentle, meliorative diminutive: "You little Slut, how did you frighten me on Sunday Night" (178)--the night his second attempted rape fails. She accedes to this indication of his linguistic power when she coquettishly requests her parents to "forgive the vain little Slut your Daughter, if I tell

you all as he was pleas'd to tell me? He said...there, Ladies, comes my pretty Rustick!"(242) This is long after he is aroused to undignified sexual excitement, not fit for ladies, at first seeing Pamela in her country clothes (61-62). Pamela's history teaches her to objectify herself as one in need of vigilant, vigorous discipline. Feeling delicate dread on the eve of her "Nuptials" (296), Pamela castigates herself; exasperated by her failure to trust completely in the certainty of promised wedded bliss, she writes that "I could beat myself for Anger" (285). Pamela does not dwindle into a complacently refined wife: she is like a hardy hero of Puritan spiritual autobiography; her language is infused by a determination to defend herself against any propensity to be complacent in her justified state.[7] But obviously her disclaimers, in magnifying her tactful, yet ardent, subservience to her gentleman husband, only construct a revised, less stultified, but more openly abject, romantic feminine chastity. Pamela, "my pretty Rustick," is indeed a pastoral heroine on the squire's estate, his Eden, his pleasant yet lucrative rural retreat. However, the central force of a religious tradition is devitalized as the pure country maiden is mythologized while any notion of the free will of the poor, feminine individual is raised only to be undercut.

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[7]Even when commenting on the Bedfordshire gentry's gracious congratulations on her "Happiness" Pamela keeps in mind what "my Lady Davers said, tho' in Anger, yet in Truth, that I am but a poor Bit of painted Dirt" (407).

Richardson denies the ability of the servant woman to intervene in her own history: Pamela begins an unwilling hostage of Mr. B., but becomes a victim of her own unconscious thoughts and desires. Her confessional/professional mode, her forthright articulation of her feeling intelligence, is diverting ("Thou art a Miracle for thy Age" [48], says Mrs. Jervis), but does not indicate that she has necessary self-knowledge, or that she can govern herself. Pamela's brave words of disassociation from Mr. B. are contradicted by her irrational passions; having left him, she discovers that "I have made an Escape, to be more a Prisoner!" (214) This episode mirrors her earlier humiliating self-discovery when her first thwarted escape ends in contemplated suicide. However, Pamela's movement from expressiveness to didacticism during this later trial demonstrates her willingness to substitute [redacted] (unfairly) discredited authority of her point of view a reliance on indoctrinated principles: the individualism of her literary style gives way to socially prescriptive forms. Very early on, Pamela demonstrates her abhorrence of suicide when she questions Mr. B.'s sophistical epithet, "Lucretia": "May I, Lucretia like, justify myself with my Death, if I am used barbarously?" (33) Pamela's immediate considerations and motivation for the suicidal act are imbued with childish pathos. She envisions that after her death

> my Master, my angry Master, will then forget his Resentments, and say, O this is the unhappy Pamela! that I have so causelessly persecuted and destroy'd! Now do I see she preferred her Honesty to her Life,

> will he say, and is no Hypocrite, nor Deceiver; but really was the innocent Creature she pretended to be! Then, thinks I, will he, perhaps, shed a few Tears over the poor Corse of his persecuted Servant...! (152)

The poor girl dejectedly hopes that "he'll be sorry when I'm dead." There is an abrupt transition, however, between the presentation of the youthful disposition and susceptibility of the heroine's imagination, and her protracted theological disquisition. The import and intensity of Pamela's isolation and frustration are abrogated by the evidence amassed in her contemplation of theodicy: "And how do I know, but that God, who sees all the lurking Vileness of my Heart, may not have permitted these Sufferings on that very Score, and to make me rely solely on his Grace and Assistance..." (153). Pamela shifts in her Journal from the expression of self-pity to that of self-abuse, from the impulse of self-assertion to that of forbearance, as she comes to accept embarrassment or distress as God's will, then Mr. B.'s will. Pamela's acknowledged love for Mr. B., like her confused sinfulness by the pond, makes her unsure of her own volition; moreover, her marriage keeps her literary keenness and her impassioned quest for justice to innocent young women within the purview of the squirearchy's interest. It is not surprising that Pamela discreetly and whole-heartedly takes on the education of Mr. B.'s illegitimate daughter, Sally Goodwin; just as the heroine is to be blamed for Mr. B.'s illicit lust for her, and must redeem herself--and him--by warding off his sexual advances while falling in love with him, so she is

eager to compensate for his earlier peccadillo with Sally Godfrey, another unmarried woman.

The linguistic and conceptual sets of the servant woman in Pamela are subordinated to the typical language and perceptual mode of the older, sophisticated, outward-looking squire. Pamela's earlier letters, written not only moment to moment but from crisis to crisis, are descriptive and reactive; being for the most part neither self-analytical nor reflective, the heroine can be accused neither of hypocrisy nor of disciplined thinking: this is her literary strength. The hyperbolic detail of Pamela's initial impressions of her male and female keepers in Lincolnshire and of the estate itself run from the comic to the gothic. Mrs. Jewkes has "an Arm as thick as my Waist" and a face which "as to Colour, looks like as if had been pickled a Month in Salt-petre" (107); Colbrand "has great staring Eyes, like the Bull's that frighten'd me so," and he "had a Sword on, with a nasty red Knot to it..." (148). The great house "looks made for Solitude and Mischief... with all its brown nodding Horrors of lofty Elms and Pines about it..." (102). These descriptions contribute to the portraiture of a young woman resisting the attempts to demoralize her through restraint and abuse, and through terrifying her with sexual threats. She feels as though, in the inn on her way to Lincolnshire, if Mr. B. were to appear, "he must have been brought thro' the Air; for I thought I was" (99), and she dreams that Mr. B. and his menacing alter-ego, Colbrand,

approach "my Bed-side, with the worst Designs" (148). Pamela's source for her stock of "Strategems and Contrivances to save herself from Violation" (411) is her literariness. Her ardent and eclectic reading includes fables (77, 78), the Bible ("Thus we read in Holy Writ..." [59]), conduct Books ("And I have read, that many a Man has been asham'd at a Repulse, that never would, had they succeeded" [50]), Church history ("I have read of a good Bishop..." [77]), military history ("I have read of a great Captain" [149]), "Poets" (113), and dramatic tales of those in need of divine intervention: "I said, like as I had read in a Book a Night or two before, Angels, and Saints, and all the Host of Heaven, defend me!" (41) Mr. B. notes of Pamela's ability to think on her feet that she can "chop Logick very prettily," and wonders bitterly "What the Duce do we Men go to School for?" (202) His vexed compliment points to Pamela's folkloric victory over him--"small and swift beats big and dumb": she is one of the irrepressible oppressed. But when she becomes a lady she stops talking, and starts listening, not only to Mr. B.'s moral lectures, but also to lessons and observations derived from her husband's gentlemanly regulated reading and Continental travel: "...I have been delighted," says Pamela, "with his Conversation upon English Authors, Poets particularly. He entertain'd me also with a Description of some of the Curiosities he had seen in Italy and France, when he made what the polite World call the grand Tour" (278). He even

comes to compose, like Pamela, "verses" [404]); but where she rhymes to comfort and fortify herself, he makes a gift to her of his writing for her solace after a sobering conversation about his last will and testament ("this Disposition" [404]). His inspired writing complements his business writing, his fulfillment of his legal and economic obligations, and indicates that he is an ideal Master/husband: conscientious, sentimental, chivalrous. Pamela is thus enveloped, her spirited genius and her native intelligence superseded by the bourgeois gentleman.

Pamela's marriage to Mr. B. represents within the rhetorical scheme of the novel more than the fulfillment of the matrimonial convenant; more than a broadening of the scope and integrity of social intercourse, and more than an affirmation and enhancement of the fellowship of the Christian community. Their sexual union is mystified, made to seem extraordinary, because it marks the achievement of a pervasive consanguinity: Pamela comes to belong to everyone. She is the exclusive partner of Mr. B., a forbidding paragon; Pamela, on the other hand, and at the same time, emblematizes the social ideal of felicitous gender and class subordination through her accessible discourse: she is Everyman's Everywoman. Mr. Williams, the right-minded but ineffectual minister, interrupted while reading a French neo-classicist, courteously remarks to Mr. B. of Pamela, in her presence of course, that "Mine, Sir...is a very beautiful piece of French: But your English has no Equal"

(258). Pamela is a national text, whose beauties are a source of pride to be studied and enjoyed. The imperial, national contexts of the novel are important. The heightening of patterns over the individual is political in several senses; literariness is inevitably sociological and ideological as well as individual. The virtue of Pamela's individualism is sublated into the more socially valuable virtues of her feminine subordination, and her feminine thoughts are annexed for the greater glory of the language.

Pamela, to affirm the biases of hierarchy, expediently perpetrates the equation of religious with family ties. The most direct expression of this powerful, political ideology is heard from Mr. B., the novel's most authoritative and most socially elevated character, after the bold merging of himself, a squire, with his lowly servant, is a fait accompli. Lady Davers, adamant that she will not accept her brother's wife as her "Sister," is checked in her belligerence by the reminder that class distinctions are--after death--nullified:

> we must all end at last; you with all your Pride, and I with my plentiful Fortune, must come to it; and then where will be your Distinction? Let me tell you, except you and I both mend our Manners, tho' you have been no Duellist, no Libertine, as you call me, this amiable Girl, whom your Vanity and Folly so much despises, will out-soar us both, infinitely out-soar us; and He that judges best, will give the Preference where due, without Regard to Birth or Fortune. (350)

But the squire's levelling argument, that all are one in Christ, is carefully hedged by proofs of Pamela's immaculately gentle virtues: she is meet to be, not just any

Christian's, but a landed gentleman's wife. He resorts to his high-minded Christian self-vindication at the height of the bitter family debate, and further bolsters his position with another unanswerable assertion, that, ironically, of his masculine privilege: "How dare you, said he, insult me by your Conduct in my own House, after I have told you I am marry'd? How dare you think of staying here one Moment, and refuse my Wife the Honours that belong to her, as such?" (351). But the essential cant of the novel's argument that a man may in principle happily and ethically marry beneath him is evident in the consideration that Mr. B. could hardly have married the waiting-maid while her mistress, his mother, was still alive, despite his bravado about Pamela's perfection and his own right to marry whom he pleases: his mother assuredly approved of the girl, but would not, certainly, bless the wife: Had Pamela's "old Lady" lived, honour for his mother and respect for convention--Biblical and social injunctions--would have prevented Mr. B. from proposing. As it is, the marriage includes compensatory obeisance to the divine father and the sainted mother. For one thing, Pamela is an ideal child-servant before she is an ideal wife; Mr. B.'s disrespect for the servant constitutes disrespect for the mistress. And there is no question that "my mother's Pamela" (202) is an excellent successor to her doting mistress. Pamela calls upon a Biblical example which contextually suggests that she deserves immunity from rape on the grounds that she and her Master have a common

spiritual progenitor. The heroine refers to Amnon's incestuous rape and his subsequent hatred for his victim, his half-sister Tamar (59): Mr. B. threatens to violate, not just a woman, but their mutual heavenly father. Significantly, Tamar, struggling to save herself from rape, pleads with her brother that the king (who is David) can be persuaded to have them married.[8] In other words, the marriage of Pamela to Mr. B., the raison d'etre of Richardson's romance, is seemly only because the squire attempts rape on his dead mother's dependent.

Pamela's natural parents look forward to her return from the arch-seducer, Mr. B.: "we shall receive you with more Pleasure than we had at your Birth" (46). She begs her Master to be allowed to return to "my Father's Cot" (84). But Pamela cannot return to her parents as their precious new-born; she must be born into Mr. B.'s family, and is bound then to be an infantilized woman, universally shared as an object of adoration through the miracle of her passion and marriage. Pamela cannot indeed escape from Lincolnshire; although she "delivers" herself, so to speak, after a fortnight's confinement in the house, so far as she "got out of a Window, not without some Difficulty, sticking a little at my Shoulders and Hips" (150), her birthlike passage does not herald a reception into the loving arms and home of her parents. She does not get through (because her "Key" does not fit the "Lock" [150]), or even over (because "the

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[8] II Samuel 13:13.

Bricks... gave way" [150]), the "Door" leading out of the "Garden"; her predicament ends in her descent into a culpable frame of mind, and hence illustrates the Biblical warning that "strait is the way, and narrow is the Gate, and few there are that find it."[9] Mr. B. finally leads Pamela, "honest" and "virtuous" "As the new-born Babe" (248), to her true and glorious destination, to be married in his family "Chapel" (288), renovated for the occasion. Mr. B. having fallen in love with her, the heroine is treated like an infant: her lover coaxes her to eat, and even feeds her (he "put, now and then, a little Bit on my Plate, and guided it into my Mouth" [280]); she must be held up on her wedding day because she can barely walk ("my knees beat so against one another" [298]); and Mr. B. helps to dress her, for she cannot choose her clothes for herself ("He thought nothing too good; but I thought everything I saw was..." [386]). And so Pamela ends like a favoured child: adorned under her Master's strict supervision (she is to make her first public "Appearance" in church, he says, in "white flower'd with Gold most richly" [386]); she "would have laid aside some of the Jewels" (399), but he forbids it, wishing her to reflect his pride in her; acting according to his minute instructions; and cherished and indulged by the whole of his community.

The wedding of Pamela and Mr. B. is of profound moment to everyone; the ceremony is the means to general Christian

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[9]Matthew 7:14.

and social communion, with Mr. B., rather than the clergy, acting as officiator and enabler of harmonious relationships. After the marriage, Mr. Peters, the minister who previously refused to intervene on behalf of the helpless servant girl, and whom Mr. B. has designated to assume the role of father in giving away the bride, is certainly reconciled to Pamela when he asserts that "you are my Daughter" (290); his clerical reception sounds curiously like that for one newly baptized rather than like that for a new bride. Once she is married, Mr. Peters assumes a properly paternal, pastoral view of her: she is a new person to him. Mr. Williams, who has presided, succeeds, as a "brother," the groom and the nominal "father" in a sort of hierarchical male reception line, with himself at the bottom, in "saluting" and complimenting Pamela--after Mr. B. has given him permission to "wish your Sister Joy" (290). This last is interesting, for Mr. B. has earlier accused Pamela of sanctimony: "my pretty Preacher! when my Lincolnshire Chaplain dies, I'll put thee on a gown and Cassock . . . " (71). Of course, Mr. Williams is meant to be that newly appointed Chaplain, and is nearly denied that position because he, although in vain, comes to the aid of, and even proposes to, Pamela. Mr. B. also taunts Pamela, when she resorts to prayer before him, with the preposterous epithet of "perfect Nun" (84). But Mr. Williams here greets her, not of course as a Roman Catholic Sister, a bride of Christ, nor as his own bride, but as the squire's new wife

and his pastoral sister. Relations between the maligned servant of Mr. B.'s parish and the pious, abused household servant are at last cordially amended by the squire--who was responsible for the disruption in the first place. Pamela and Mr. Williams, bound by their complete dependence upon and unquestioning subservience to the good squire, are, by his condescending intervention on his wedding day, confirmed in an affective tie through his comfortable recollection of their Christian consanguinity.

Remarkably, not only does Pamela fit into her late mistress' garments, and her shoes ("for my old Lady had a very little Foot" [31]), but Mr. Andrews fits Mr. B.'s "Suits," "Hats," and "Shoes" (264). Their convenient sizes suggest that father and daughter fit the bill to be favoured. The father's humble cognizance of station and his loyalty to kin are seen to be as becoming to him as Mr. B.'s hand-me-downs (Pamela teases her mother that "you must expect to see my Father as a great Beau" [264]). Mr. Andrews, and his wife, are to be faithful stewards of Mr. B.'s "Kentish Estate" (408). They have already proven themselves to be honest, hard workers, and splendid instructors--better than the widowed mother of Mr. B. and his sister; her feminine government of her son and daughter is insufficient ("my poor Mother had enough to do with us both" recalls Mr. B. [341]). Pamela's parents are sure to industriously apply their god-given talents to improve the holdings of their Master/Son. Another indication of Mr.

Andrews' model character is found in the striking resemblance between his presentation and that of his daughter; the similarities prove that Pamela's facile subordination is not an inherent attribute of her gender, but is to be traced to her training within her class origins. So Mr. Andrews is prone to sensible tears; he is manipulated by Mr. B. as a gratifying show-piece for ladies' and gentlemen (Mr. B. arranges, when Mr. Andrews arrives unexpectedly in Lincolnshire, a "Surprizing meeting between father and daughter, desiring, he tells his friends, to "make you all witness to their first Interview . . ." [249]); he displays overwhelming modesty in choosing fine clothes. The school-master exhibits, in other words, an affective, as well as moral, sympathy with the squire; and this in addition to his sturdy respect for class and gender distinction. Mr. B.'s adoption of his in-law's interest not only circumvents any embarrassment to do with the position of his wife's family; it also advances domestic and social harmony with no inconvenience, but to the actual advantage and pleasure of the squirearchy. Richardson's bourgeois optimism in Pamela would seem to consist of a belief that education in self-restraint on the one hand and benevolence on the other will effect the utopian condition of hierarchical love, and love of hierarchy.

Mr. B. derisively yet correctly predicts that the outcome of their relationship, which shapes the developing story of Pamela's journal, will be "a pretty Story in

Romance" (42); but Richardson's romance is the sugar-coating for a male bourgeois pill. The heroine is bestowed only with the appearance of sympathetic power; her rhetorical progress to marriage, her pretty romance, is not a triumph of her individual will, but a means to the relinquishing of it. Surprisingly, many critics nonetheless accept Pamela as the happy heroine. Terry Eagleton in The Rape of Clarissa points to Richardson's conflicting commitments to class interests and "individual freedom," explaining that Pamela is a "cartoon," while, "in a devastating demystification, Clarissa will give us the tragic reality."[10] However, Eagleton does not take into account that Pamela too is subjected to the constraining conclusions of class and gender bias. Patricia McKee, interested in Foucauldian notions of the use of "discourses of knowledge" as the means "for considering power,"[11] is impressed that

> Pamela, by embracing the disorderly excess of experience, may be seen to constitute a reconciliation both of the real differences among human beings and those between reality and art... Pamela's art is thus precisely the means of representing both the differences between individuals as indecisive differences, and representation itself as an inclusive phenomenon.[12]

But surely the language of Richardson's text maintains and strengthens conventional distinctions, and the novel resolves conflict through the capitulation of the heroine to the male hero. Carol Kay in "Sympathy, Sex, and Authority in

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[10]Terry Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) 39.
[11]Patricia McKee, "Corresponding Freedoms: Language and the Self in Pamela," ELH 52.3 (Fall 1985): 647.
[12]McKee 623.

Richardson and Hume" is more astute in recognizing the relation between political history and literary style. She suggests that

> Even if we do not wish to picture a society of writers minutely and repeatedly scrutinizing Leviathan, we have reason to believe that the reaction to civil war could lead anyone to share Hobbes's great goal, the foundation of social peace, and also share his irrepressible anxiety about the many provocations to competition.[13]

But, explains Kay, Richardson, Hume, and other contributors to the discourse on sympathy direct their "attention to social rules rather than to the arbitrary imposition of political authority."[14] Literature, that is, works to naturalize imposed differences in social relations. The literate culture of the time placed "confidence in what Hobbes had feared, the ductility of power, the multitudinous forces and points of pressure that constitute moral opinion. The power of art to elicit sympathy was a favourite source of evidence in the eighteenth century for the disinterested nature of moral judgement."[15] The period in question had indeed little to fear from "the ductility of power" where poor women are concerned, if the rhetorical structures of Pamela are typical of its operation: Richardson aims to confirm hierarchy as a pleasing, homogenous social objective.

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[13]Carol Kay, "Sympathy, Sex, and Authority in Richardson and Hume," Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture, Vol. 12. ed. Harry C. Payne (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1983) 77.
[14]Kay 78.
[15]Kay 90.

## IV. Women in Rasselas: Epistemology and the Primacy of Salvation

Marlene R. Hansen has recently observed that Johnson's Rasselas[1] is "the work of a traditional humanist, but one whose humanism includes the whole human race."[2] Insofar as Johnson refuses to romanticize the degradation of women--and the poor--Hansen's critical statement is an accurate assessment, but it suggests a blandness of purpose, not to mention comprehensive implications for the cause of women's advancement, which are assuredly not evident in Johnson's fiction. While Johnson satirizes romantic sexuality and pastoral visions as vicious denials of real evil, he differentiates forms of suffering to view them as specific manifestations of the generalized existential problem of desire. Unhappiness is not conditional; it has its basis neither in the circumstances of social position nor in the eccentricities of individual character, but is an inevitable and shared ground of being. Johnson includes in Rasselas, that is, a philosophic construction which enables him to accommodate the contrary impulses of conventional power structures and the prevailing mode of moral sympathy: he remains true to liberal ideas about rational equality within hierarchy while he explains and compassionates the

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[1]Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson and Brian Jenkins (London: Oxford UP, 1971). All further references will be to this edition.

[2]Marlene R. Hansen, "Sex, and Love, Marriage and Friendship: A Feminist Reading of the Quest for Happiness in Rasselas," English Studies 66.6 (December 1985): 525.

irrational hope for individual ascendancy within society. In Johnson's Rasselas, the will to dominate is elusive and delusive, romantic and alienating. On the other hand, Johnson views the compulsion of human psychological desire with empathy. The mind which chafes under domination, yet yearns to dominate, and the heart which longs for mutual affection, but retreats into monomaniacal fantasy, are at once poignant, absurd, and capable only of partial happiness. In Rasselas the complexity and subtlety of psychic life are explored within the context of relations between different ranks, ages, and sexes; these are contained within a doctrinal, theological framework. Johnson refers his acute insights into psychology and his profound sympathy for generalized dissatisfaction to a religious belief in an afterlife: Rasselas is an ironic depiction of the futile quest for the ideal "choice of life" which leads the characters to an understanding of their transcendent purpose in the "choice of eternity." Restiveness, envy, and discontent are universal ills which are accountable not so much to a fallible construction of mind, whereby perspective, and therefore wisdom, are finite, nor to the restrictions of social stratification, but rather to a condition of being--the infinity of imaginative desire--which portends the infinity of eternal life. Although Rasselas portrays the operation of sexual and social prerogatives, the hierarchies of age, gender, and station are not deeply accepted on their own merits. Rather,

the psychological dynamics of subordination are recognized, credited, and, finally, subsumed by the static view of a universal divine purpose.

Knowledge in Rasselas is at best an uncertain means to what is primary: salvation. Therefore, espousal in Rasselas of certain extensions of liberal theories of knowledge, such as the educational improvement of women through book-knowledge and rational converse, and the explosion of romantic, sentimental fallacies which mislead or demean women, does not tend to the conclusion that women should move beyond their ascribed position into public, worldly roles: the respect for intellectual attainment in Rasselas is held in tandem with a sanctioning of social and sexual subordination. Intellectual and conversational poise of Johnson's women characters is regulated by their respect for hierarchy, and lends itself to the virtue of their sociability, which is crucial to their contribution to and achievement of moral instruction and harmonious companionship.

All the characters in Rasselas--Rasselas, Imlac, Nekayah, Pekuah, and the astronomer--are on the same rational and moral plane; each character has dialogical integrity, regardless of age, sex, or station. This is not to say that points of view are interchangeable; the narrative, reflecting a Lockean imperative, makes it clear that individual perspectives have as their bases particular experiences: Johnson attributes differences in standpoint to

social position. But experiences, however different in substance, are analogous in process: characters come to the same conclusions, but by different means. And, in keeping with Johnson's theological theme, no character (not even the narrator) has a complete and infallible perspective. Even those privileged with authority within hierarchy are compromised by partial understanding; social position does not alter rational potential. Old and young, men and women, royalty and servants, do experience and can acknowledge the vanity of human wishes even as they hope against hope for the blessings of the future. The possibility of such a moral consensus is rooted in an epistemological assumption about universal dispositions of mind, and accounts for the development between the characters in Rasselas of a charitable affinity and a shared religious consciousness. Science, philosophy, and theology merge so that knowledge and subordination are valued as humane means to a cosmic purpose.

The ironic allusion in Rasselas to Biblical experiences of human perfection of salvation underscores not only the fiction's theme of the vanity of human wishes, but also Johnson's didactic point that it is necessary to learn the virtuous dignity of humility--resignation being psychologically impossible--in the face of the inevitable disappointments of human schemes. The narrator explains that "the wisdom or policy of antiquity" contrives for royal progeny an artificial paradise, the "Happy Valley" (ch. I).

Although this secure and exclusive refuge includes a lake "inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature taught to dip the wing in water," and "All animals that bite the grass, or brouse the shrub, whether wild or tame," the Edenic plenitude is illusory; "beasts of prey" are kept out: "the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded." While in Eden there is no evil, and Adam is master over all animals, Rasselas's detached observation of the animals occasions his soliloquy on his dissatisfaction in the Happy Valley (ch. II); he is not driven out of this false Eden, but seeks escape from it as from a "prison" (ch. XII).

Noah's ark, the salvation of the righteous human few, includes, like Eden, and unlike the Happy Valley, all animals. The palace of the Happy Valley is, however, immune to the forces of nature, like Noah's ark to the Flood:

> The roofs were turned into arches of massy stone joined with a cement that grew harder by time, and the building stood from century to century, deriding the solstitial rains and equinoctial hurricanes, without need of reparation. (ch. I)

And during a remarkable "rainy season," when "the rain continued longer and with more violence than had been ever known," and "all the level of the valley was covered with the inundation," the palace is safe, ark-like--but the animals retreat (ch. VIII). Only the building's structure, and the limited space within, remain intact; the Valley itself succumbs, like the sinful Biblical world before the Flood, to the damaging rains. Fittingly, Rasselas is engaged

by the wisdom, expansiveness, and ingenuity of Imlac during this time, and goes on to plan with him his successful--yet futile--escape. Neither Rasselas nor his father, neither political regimes nor adventurous youth, can attain immunity from the laws of nature and of being. The inhabitants of the Happy Valley do not regard it as a haven, Imlac admits to Rasselas:

> 'I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat.' (ch. XII)

The Happy Valley is under the auspices of Rasselas' father, "the mighty emperour, in whose dominions the Father of waters begins his course" (ch. I). Neither "the wisdom or policy of antiquity" (ch. I), nor the father/emperor of Abissinia can contain the prince and his friends. But just as the flood confines the inhabitants of the Happy Valley to the palace, so, despite their self-exile from the Happy Valley, they are again subject to, it is reported in the final chapter, "the Father of waters": "the river began to rise. They were confined to their house" (ch. XLIX). The natural and the human realms, which are both, interestingly, characterized as paternal--"the Father of Waters," and Rasselas's father--are parallel in the limitations of their power: the venerable Nile and Abissinia's sovereign fail to restrain the delusive desires of their subjects. During their temporary imprisonment in Cairo, Pekuah, Nekayah, and Rasselas devise various utopian plans of government; Imlac and the astronomer also wish for the impossible, "to be

driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port" (ch. XLIX). Imlac, in his youth, having dispensation from his father, says that he "'travelled to the shore of the red sea. When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters my heart bounded like that of a prisoner escaped'" (ch. VIII). But the waters part neither literally nor metaphorically; he is bound to sail upon them, and finds life at sea a disappointment. Ironically, the astronomer, in his maturity, has believed himself to have sovereign power over the elements: he confides to Imlac that "'the clouds, at my call, have poured their waters'" (ch. XLI). He carries to an extreme what is implicit in the visionary projects and systems of Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah, Imlac, and the tradition of Abissinia--a desire for self-government, and government of others, which is god-like. The astronomer in his mad assumption of illusory responsibility is not only miserable, but forfeits the dignity attached to his place as an elderly scholar; unable to manage his own welfare, he becomes subject to the feminine ministrations of Pekuah.

The mutually inconclusive decision of Rasselas and his party, cited in the closing paragraph of their story, indicates that they concede the futility of stepping beyond their originally appointed worldly circumstances:

> Of these wishes that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained. They deliberated a while what was to be done, and resolved, when the inundation should cease, to return to Abissinia. (ch. XLIX)

The essential conservatism of Rasselas is clear here: freedom is universally desired and universally disappointing, because mortal existence is qualified by the laws of a fallen world. Acknowledgement of this basic assumption is, according to the schema of Rasselas, sane; voluntary submission, not to say subjugation, to the existential conditions and structures of being, is wise. The return of Rasselas and his party from Egypt to the government of his father signals their sanity and their wisdom, and implies their piety.

The experience and development of each of the five chief protagonists in Rasselas (Rasselas, Imlac, Nekayah, Pekuah, and the astronomer) illustrate and confirm generalizations about the insidiousness of romantic, utopian fantasy and the justice of a measured acceptance of authority. Together, these principles are conducive to the operation of the wariness and humility imperative to recall the mind to its task of sociability and ethical conduct. Disparate characters are bound together by self-interest, the familiarity of custom, the obligation of loyalty, and the like-mindedness derived from shared knowledge and experience. But this formation of community is not achieved in the abstract, by disembodied brains. The psychological processes of attraction, rivalry, disaffection, and reconciliation are given dramatic emphasis. The structural relationships between the characters are precisely defined, and the effect of rank, age, and gender on their motivation

and conduct is depicted with clarity. Rasselas, that is, anatomizes the intricacies of social interaction where participants vary in degrees of social status and psychological importance to each other. The psychological and political interest in Rasselas lies not wholly in a philosophic recognition of a universal propensity to lunacy and self-centredness. The story also includes the implementation by the characters of strategies to counter, in themselves and in others, discontent, egocentric delusion, and even monomania. In their efforts to prudently assess the common worth of the self in relation to the degree of esteem assigned to hierarchical position, the characters avoid the danger of subjugation; they serve, but are not slavish.

Rasselas is a prince of Abissinia: yet, being fourth in the line of succession (ch. II), he is presumably not indispensable in the Happy Valley. He has in the emigrating group, which includes himself, Imlac, Nekayah, and Pekuah, and which is later augmented by the astronomer, the highest rank, is of the privileged gender, and, though young and naive, is not juvenile. He is therefore the most likely to be the initiator, and to be justified in the pursuit, of an outlawed escape. But Rasselas is not the central subject of Johnson's work. As the story progresses, the initial focus on Rasselas enlarges to include others, so that he comes to be seen as one equal dimension of a large body, despite his position in the hierarchy. He has more formal distinction,

but no more moral authority or personal sway, than any of his retinue: deference is rendered to him out of respect for his rank.

Although Imlac is Rasselas's advisor in the project of the escape, he is a faithful servant of the emperor; he fulfills his obligation, though to no effect, as a sage in the Happy Valley, to tell "the sons and daughters of Abissinia . . . of nothing but the miseries of public life . . ." (ch. II). Imlac's attendance on Rasselas in the outside world is also a mark of his loyalty: he is able to ensure the prince's safety, and to establish the verity of his teaching concerning the vain hope of happiness outside the Happy Valley. Imlac first succeeds in entertaining the prince; his poetry displays a breadth of knowledge and experience which pleases Rasselas, who, when they first become acquainted, "thought himself happy in having found a man who knew the world so well" (ch. VII). The venerable Imlac's self-esteem is in turn gratified by the prince's attention: "The poet pitied his ignorance, and loved his curiosity" (ch. VII). But while Imlac, worldly-wise and learned, is competent to manage a secret quest into the world outside the Happy Valley, and to elucidate the ways of the world to Rasselas, his tendency to lapse into self-importance and verbosity exasperates the prince. Just as Rasselas peremptorily checks Imlac's extravagant and digressive description of the infinite scope of the poet's profession ("'Enough! Thou hast convinced me, that no human

being can ever be a poet. Proceed with thy narration'" [ch. XI]), so he rejects Imlac as a final authority in his role as an advisor. When Rasselas invites Imlac to be his "sole director in the choice of life," and Imlac responds with an exaggerated account, voiced in turgid metaphors, of the perils of Rasselas's scheme, Rasselas resents his direction: "'Do not seek to deter me from my purpose . . .'" (ch. XII). Imlac's reply is at once sympathetic and prudent: "'if your determination is fixed, I do not counsel you to despair.'" The prince and the sage thwart the self-satisfaction of the other; Imlac, however, the wise attendant of a prince, gracefully complies with his commands.

Rasselas discovers that his sister Nekayah is an equally faithful follower, but a more kindred spirit, than Imlac. It is crucial, though, that Rasselas and Nekayah's reciprocal affection and mutual intention to discover the world are conjoined with social difference. "Natural" feeling and curiosity are filtered through socially induced distinctions: a divergence of experience, or at least of perspective on experience, results. Initially, the workings of an imposed gender system are only represented; the narrator begins, however, to pointedly account for the sources of difference between the brother and sister.

Nekayah, having discovered Rasselas and Imlac tunnelling out of the Happy Valley, keeps her brother's secret out of "fondness" and canny self-interest: "'Permit me to fly with you from this tasteless tranquillity . . .'"

(ch. XIV).[3] Rasselas consents, glad to gain her confidence: he "loved Nekayah above his other sisters . . ." (ch. XIV). The decorum of Nekayah's request is significant: though a princess, and with as much ardour and vigour as her brother ("'You may deny me to accompany you, but cannot hinder me from following'"), and as capable of paying her own way on the journey ("The prince and princess had jewels sufficient to make them rich whenever they came into a place of commerce" [ch. XV]), she begs her brother's permission ("'Permit me'"). It seems irrelevant whether she is older or younger than her brother; the status of manhood evidently overrides the chronology of birth. Nekayah participates in the labour of the escape, although she does not help in the physical work of digging; rather, as befits a woman who has shown aptitude for stealthy observation and discovery, she is set to "watch, lest any other straggler should . . . follow them to the mountain" (ch. XIV). The assignment of her task reflects a delicate acknowledgement of her sex and her sense.

Rasselas and Nekayah both tremble, and feel trepidation, as they first realize freedom outside the Happy Valley, but Rasselas's reaction is modulated by a consciousness of male decorum: "The prince felt nearly the same emotions" as the princess, "though he thought it more manly to conceal them" (ch. XV). And Rasselas has an initial advantage over Nekayah in the outside world because he has

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[3] Ironically, Rasselas has evinced great interest in the scheme of the mechanical genius "to fly" (ch. VI).

been drilled by Imlac:

> The prince had, by frequent lectures, been taught the use and nature of money; but the ladies could not, for a long time, comprehend . . .. (ch. XVI)

Just as the brother is bolder out of compulsion, so the sister is incompetent because of her ignorance.

Imlac is useful to the prince and princess, but his instruction does not point them toward happiness. They project their resentment at the abortiveness of their random adventures onto Imlac, and band together to accomplish their own systematic researches into the ideal choice of life. Imlac having fallen temporarily out of favour with the prince and princess, Nekayah assumes his posture as a sincere advisor but occasionally grandiose orator. She assimilates, that is, his role and manner as a retainer even as she rejects his service. Her initiative in proposing that Rasselas investigate the public realm of "power" and "the private recesses of domestick peace" reflects her subordinate role as a giver of comfort and encouragement as much as it demonstrates her inventiveness and rational method. And although she suggests that they "divide the task between them" (ch. XXIII) of observation and inquiry, the division of their labour--the example of the Queen of Sheba aside--is hardly arbitrary. Nekayah's suggestions have a feminine propriety: she does not parody or aspire to any male role. Nekayah in the purview of her self-assigned research accommodates the female role to suit the purposes of her own intellectual curiosity and egotistical desire

within the larger framework of the prince's intent to learn. The princess is thus far successful; Rasselas is an appreciative auditor of his sister's plan: he "applauded the design. . ." (ch. XXIV).

Ironically, Imlac occasions an exclusive, joint career for Rasselas and Nekayah, but his axiomatic wisdom and the timely interposition of his counsel resolve the acrimony which has arisen in the conversation between the prince and princess, as well as the disaffection between them and himself. This reconciliation proves not only the validity of Imlac's moral observations, but also the possibility of the resolution, by means of thoughtful sociability, of particular wills and viewpoints asserted by those of different ranks and genders.

The prince and princess together undergo disappointing encounters with "pastoral simplicity" (shepherds are "envious savages" [ch. XIX]) and with the hermit ("'The life of a solitary man will be certainly miserable'" [ch. XXI]), and are appalled by the Bassa's political "danger" (ch. XX). Rasselas ranges further than his sister, and experiences more such disenchantments with various states of life. Finding that he is answered by Imlac "with new doubts, and remarks that give him no comfort," he turns for inspiration to Nekayah, "who had yet the same hope with himself, and always assisted him to give some reason why, though he had been hitherto frustrated, he might succeed at last" (ch. XXIII). The prince and princess undertake their own

discoveries, and in a lengthy conversation they report, compare, and reflect upon their experiences. The texture of this part of the narrative typifies the peculiar merging in Rasselas of ideology and psychology. The dialogue is densely philosophical, while the voices are intensely personal. The voices are incredulous of each other, and in emulous contest; they are impatient to hear truths which do not exist, and they strive for rhetorical precedence. Their conversation ends inconclusively when they have expressed universal truths, articulated as axiomatic wisdom, and when they deflect their frustration by collectively engaging in the novelty of action.

Rasselas discovers that "the splendour of the courts" (ch. XXIII) and "the prerogatives of power" (ch. XXIV) yield treachery and even brutality. For her part, Nekayah finds that domestic life is characterized by tedium or discord (chs. XXV, XXVI). The prince and princess reproach each other for these analogous qualities of being, thereby repeating their conduct in blaming Imlac for what cannot be helped. Rasselas discredits "his sister's observations" by accusing her of pessimism:

> 'Your narrative, says he, throws yet a darker gloom upon the prospects of futurity: the predictions of Imlac were but faint sketches of the evils painted by Nekayah.' (ch. XXVII)

She, in her turn, attributes his convictions about life acted "in a wider compass" to moral and intellectual weakness:

> 'The discontent, said the princess, which is thus

> unreasonable, I hope that I shall always have spirit to despise, and you, power to depress.' (ch. XXVII)

The pique of the prince and princess, who are brother and sister, as well as observers of the operation of civil and court affairs (Nekayah refers to the "partition of our provinces" [ch. XXV]), ironically illustrates the dissension and discontent which distinguishes, they conclude, both "domestick" and "public" existence. Their debate is not only bitter, but querulous; added to the attempt to assert their own hopes as real is the determination for each to prove his or her power of reasoning as unquestionable. The propensity, already noted, of the prince and princess to contradict and gainsay the tendency of each other's arguments is sustained throughout their conversation ("'How the world is peopled, returned Nekayah, is not my care, and needs not be yours'" [ch. XXVIII]; "'But surely, said the prince, you suppose the chief motive of choice forgotten or neglected . . . Thus it is, said Nekayah, that philosophers are deceived'" [ch. XXIX]). The prince, moreover, reproves the princess's modes of speech. At the opening of their conversation, Nekayah's loquacious and high-flown address to the Nile is reminiscent of Imlac's verbal excesses, and is received by Rasselas with similar, comic curtness:

> 'Answer, said she, great father of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations, to the invocations of the daughter of thy native king...You are then, said Rasselas, not more successful in private houses than I have been in courts.' (ch. XXV)

Later, however, Rasselas haughtily makes specific rhetorical

criticisms:

> 'Dear princess, said Rasselas, you fall into the common errours of exaggeratory declamation, by producing, in a familiar disquisition, examples of national calamities....' (ch. XXVIII)

He objects also to her abuse of syllogism:

> 'Both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst.' (ch. XXVIII)

Imlac has pointed out to Rasselas that "Inconsistencies. . . cannot both be right, but imputed to man, they may both be true" (ch. VIII). This explanation suggests the deficiency of rationalism; indeed, Nekayah's spirited, if acerbic, defense of her inconsistent reasoning refers to the limitation of perspective and the irreducibility of experience to prescription:

> 'I did not expect, answered the princess, to hear that imputed to falshood which is the consequence only of frailty . . .Where we see or conceive the whole at once we readily note the discriminations and decide the preference: but of two systems, of which neither can be surveyed by any human being in its full compass of magnitude and multiplicity of complication, where is the wonder, that judging of the whole by parts, I am alternately affected by one and the other as either presses on my memory or fancy?' (ch. XXVIII)

Rasselas responds to this feeling and articulate admission of human fallibility with a sympathetic concession:

> 'Let us not add, said the prince, to the other evils of life, the bitterness of controversy, nor endeavour to vie with each other in subtilties of argument. We are employed in a search, of which both are equally to enjoy the success, or suffer by the miscarriage. It is therefore fit that we assist each other.' (ch. XXVIII)

Nekayah in the next chapter effects another, more inclusive reconciliation--one between themselves and Imlac--by

recalling the sage's proverb concerning the vanity of hoping to achieve perfection:

> 'Every hour, answered the princess, confirms my prejudice in favour of the position so often uttered by the mouth of Imlac, "That nature sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left."' (ch. XXIX)

Imlac's wisdom is tested and confirmed by her own experience; her "prejudices" are therefore aligned with his. When Imlac enters, proposing that they pursue the novel diversion of historical, moral interest at the pyramids, the prince and princess move from dubiety, to concession, to conviction that they will benefit from this attempt at mutual discovery. He persuades them, that is, that "'we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas . . .'" (ch. XXX).

Imlac convinces Nekayah of his ideas as much by delicate negotiation as by assertion; he therefore proves his contention that "'Example is always more efficacious than precept'" (ch. XXX). He exerts his suasion, not only through verbal pronouncements, such as the ones that draw the prince, princess, and himself together, but also by action in the instance of Nekayah's drastic resolution to enter, out of grief for the loss of her maid Pekuah, a cloister (ch. XXXV). Imlac protects the well-being of Nekayah, and consequently the comfort of Rasselas, by overcoming the obstacles to his judgement of her reasoned arguments and the force of her superior rank. He exercises tact and shows deference to her, yet in advising Rasselas of a plausible way to induce an extension of her patience, is able to engage her brother's power to sway her. The elder

man and younger woman do not debate in private; Imlac's attendance on and conversations with Nekayah are decorously mediated by the presence of Rasselas. Yet Imlac feels the exigence of her regal prerogative; when subjected to her importunate inquiries about the progress of the search for Pekuah, Imlac avoids the princess, but she "commanded him to attend her," albeit with apologies for her impatience. She is persuaded to forego a life "in solitude" by Imlac's rational discourse and by dint of his indirect, benign coercion. Imlac employs his master as his agent: Rasselas is "advised by Imlac to require of Nekayah" patience and compliance to her brother's plan of compromise. Rasselas, that is, suggests that

> 'the enquiry after the unfortunate lady is still continued, and shall be carried on with yet greater diligence, on condition that you will promise to wait a year for the event, without any unalterable resolution. Nekayah thought this a reasonable demand . . ..' (ch. XXXV)

The conditional promise, guided by the sage elder's advice, is directed to the young woman's welfare. Feeling and thoughtful though she may be, her own will misleads her in her choice. Imlac openly demonstrates his wisdom as a sage and, surreptitiously, his wily faithfulness as a servant.

Pekuah occupies the most humble situation of the four travellers; like Imlac, she serves, but she is younger than he, and a woman. Rasselas, with the impulse, but not in the manner, of a fairy story, compensates for her lower station with a multifaceted vindication of her appealing ingenuity. Pekuah captures the attention and the compliance of Nekayah,

Rasselas, Imlac, and the astronomer. She balks at attending Nekayah in the pyramid; the gothic sensisibility of her speech and gestures ("She spoke, and threw her arms around her mistress" [ch. XXXI]) compromises the princess's authority: Nekayah's fondness and surprise make her relent--for which she is later commended by Imlac (ch. XXXIV). Pekuah, subsequently abducted from the tents outside the pyramids by a marauding Arab, conducts herself with aplomb throughout the adventure. On her return, she makes pungent observations, to the interested audience of her superiors ("in the presence of the prior and his brethren, the prince required of Pekuah the history of her adventures" [ch. XXXVII]), upon the undignified and demeaning aspects of submissive feminine domesticity. Finally, she undertakes the intelligent, conscious and successful use of feminine wiles, against the supposedly better judgement of Rasselas and Imlac, who do not wish her to deceive the astronomer about her intentions in visiting him, to cure the mad astronomer. She begins, that is, as an ignorant, inexperienced young woman who is isolated from her mistress and their male protectors at the pyramids out of the fear of "apparitions" (ch. XXXI), and ends as the initial, effective agent in incorporating within Rasselas's circle an aged, learned man who describes himself as being "like a man habitually afraid of spectres" (ch. XLVI). The astronomer, like Pekuah, ceases to think superstitiously when engaged in rational, sociable activity. The equivalence of psychic stability is the

occasion of the cohesion of Rasselas's group; feminine sensibility is the means. This invaluable capability of women within their role confirms that their place in the gender hierarchy is not restrictive, for it provides them with necessary and pleasing, as opposed to arbitrary or contrived, occupation.

Rasselas exposes the illogic and ineffectiveness of the patriarchal rule in the Happy Valley, where the inhabitants can evade, mentally and physically, the tyranny of enforced lassitude: Imlac employs his powers of memory and reflection to pass the time (ch. XII); Rasselas escapes. But freedom is subject to the forces of physical and human nature, and is finite. The "Father of waters" is irresistible, and the mechanical genius cannot fly (ch. VI). Desires originate in the imagination; when they are mediated by other minds and wills in experience, they prove illusory. The desires and constraints which are typical to women are, on the face of it, similar to those of male characters: the feminine is a socially specific category which illustrates one aspect of an integrated community and a universal psychology. The badly practiced male domestic rule which results in the female vacuousness Nekayah observes in "private homes" and Pekuah in a "seraglio" is not experienced by Nekayah and Pekuah in their shared quest with Rasselas, Imlac, and the astronomer. The separation of Nekayah and Pekuah from a familiar, affectionate, rational domestic community is unsatisfactory and ends in the ennui which plagues

subjugated women. Nekayah and Pekuah observe that the feminine predicament consists of an insufficiency of diverting, improving activity and companionship. Their very ability to evaluate the troubling aspects of the female condition is a measure of their distance from the extremes of skittishness and torpor which they observe in other, less respected, and therefore less reasonable, women. The superior yet credible fluency and felicity of the two female protagonists derives from their participation in the civilizing activity of rational, pleasant discourse within the bounds of conventional decorum. Johnson depicts in Rasselas a modest adjustment of common domestic attitudes and practices, which at once uplifts women and sustains traditional order.

The curious displacement of the male in Pekuah's desires serves to reinforce the concept of women's subordination even as it denies any necessary s lity to men. The Arab and the astronomer are both admirers of Pekuah, and are both star-gazers; they are charmed by and grateful for her attentive intelligence. Nonetheless, her desired place is with Nekayah. The women's intimate and instructive friendship ("'knowledge is nothing but as it is communicated'" says Nekayah [ch. XXXV]) is uncomplicated by sexual passion or intellectual intensity, by romance or abstract natural philosophy. Nekayah and Pekuah are not, like the women in the seraglio, merely sexual beings, nor do they, like the tedious and sometimes absurd philosophers and

sages encountered by Rasselas, hanker after knowledge for its own sake; rather, the women prefer a feeling of usefulness to community. Rasselas addresses itself to a modest reform of women's occupations and an ironic deflation of the male perception of his own superiority, but certainly not to any experimental, Rasselas-like escape from the male jurisdiction. Women are crucial to men's "comfort": "fly to business or to Pekuah" Imlac advises the astronomer (ch. XLVI). For the Stoic philosopher, too, it is womanly attention, not study, which is the mainstay of his well-being. His use of pedantic, implicitly misogynist metaphor is ironically countered by his own lamentation, spoken in the immediacy of grief. He first explains that "when fancy, the parent of fashion, usurps the domination of the mind . . . she betrays the fortresses of the intellect to rebels, and excites her children to sedition against reason their lawful sovereign" (ch. XVIII). But it is not "fancy," personified as a vicious, traiterous wife/mother, that overthrows the composure of the philosopher, but the untimely death of "'My daughter, my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age'" (ch. XVIII). In Rasselas, women are subordinate, not by male fiat, but in response to male pathos. The attribution or justification of the social organization of women by reference to the existing desires of men might be regarded as a pointlessly circular procedure, or a hopelessly selfish one. But according to the theological terms of Rasselas, the

operation of desire need not be circular, or insular. Desires are universally directed to the future, and ultimately to the transcendent future of eternal life, a consensus which the characters pensively reach in the book's penultimate chapter, and which, significantly, is articulated explicitly by a woman:

> 'To me, said the princess, the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity.' (ch. XLVIII)

The structured ambiguity of women's service and place is neatly accomplished in Rasselas.

Pekuah is the princess' maid as well as her devoted companion ("she was served by her favourite Pekuah" [ch. XVI]). The Arab, on the other hand, is a dashing, exotic, and gallant man, who exalts and flatters her. But Pekuah finds her position with the Arab equivocal and unsettling, and her captivity dreary. She finds herself at once a "sovereign" (ch. XXXIX) and a slave; she "governs," yet longs for her mistress. The Arab's power over her is menacing, and his civility hypocritical. The alternative to the romance and gallantry of her situation--which is, in fact, a polite tyranny motivated by the Arab's greed for her ransom--is her return to her pleasing and friendly service to her mistress. Her later repentance of a persistent fantasy, when she resolves, she says, not to "'imagine myself the queen of Abissinia'" (ch. XLIV), is, therefore, underscored by her unhappy experience as a quasi-potentate with the Arab. The Arab initially mistakes her rank,

thinking her a "princess" (ch. XXXVIII); she is anxious to correct him, fearing that he will charge an exorbitant ransom. When he returns her to her friends, Rasselas doubles Pekuah's promised reward to the Arab for his solicitous treatment of her: ". . . Rasselas gave her an hundred ounces of gold, which she presented to the Arab for the fifty that were promised" (ch. XXXIX). Her queenly generosity, as though to a vassal, is directed by a real prince, her master, who is grateful for his sister's joy on Pekuah's return. Rasselas's payment magnanimously obliges Nekayah; in turn, Pekuah's recognized role as the princess's favourite gives her the power of largesse over her captor and former lord. Just as Rasselas and the Arab are distinguished more by their attitudes towards riches than by the difference in the amount of their possessions, so their domestic government is morally differentiated along the lines of their regard for feminine feeling.

Although Pekuah is treated by the avaricious Arab as "the leader of the troop," she perceives the hollowness of his deference: "'We wandered about . . . for some weeks, whether, as our chief pretended, for my gratification, or, as I rather suspected, for some convenience of his own'" (ch. XXXIX). Pekuah warns her maids to affect complaisance before the Arab's troop: "'I commanded them not to irritate those who had us in their power'" (ch. XXXVIII). She finds it imperative that she herself appear to be sweetly yielding and engaged by the Arab's courtesy:

> 'I grew at last hopeless and dejected, and cared so little to entertain him, that he for a while more frequently talked with my maids. That he should fall in love with them or with me, might have been equally fatal, and I was not much pleased with the growing friendship. My anxiety was not long; for, as I recovered some degree of chearfulness, he returned to me, and I could not forbear to despise my former uneasiness.' (ch. XXXIX)

Pekuah's appeal and influence are not absolute, but depend upon her keen awareness of his motives and desires.

At his fortress, the Arab indicates to her that "'in this place . . . you are to consider yourself as sovereign'" (ch. XXXIX). He leaves her "to govern in his absence." The women under her sway are merely servile, however: "they began to vie with each other in obsequiousness and reverence" (ch. XXXIX). Similarly, Nekayah, parted from Pekuah, finds that her maids are self-interested sycophants: "They hoped . . . that their mistress would find another friend who might supply her place" (ch. XXXIV). The value of the elevated status of Nekayah and Pekuah is nullified by the absence of the engaging virtue of mutual esteem in the relationship with their subordinates. Their experiences replicate the distressingly empty reward of the Arab's absolute authority over his women, who are confined and uneducated. His treatment of them is not conducive to civilized satisfaction. Pekuah, responding to Nekayah's question about Pekuah's failure to make the Arab's women her "'companions,'" dismisses the sufficiency of their female arts to occupy the mind:

> 'Their business was only needlework . . . but you

> know that the mind will easily straggle from the fingers, nor will you suspect that captivity and absence from Nekayah could receive solace from silken flowers.' (ch. XXXIX)

Pekuah's answer is a womanly appeal and an elegant compliment to her mistress. It is also ironic that she derives no more aesthetic satisfaction from executing repetitive floral patterns than the Arab does from beholding the female bodies under his mastery. Rasselas, incredulous that the Arab could "take any pleasure in his seraglio," wonders whether the absence of feminine companionship is compensated by some supremely sensual pleasure: "'Are they exquisitely beautiful?'" (ch. XXXIX) Pekuah explains that the concubines are to the Arab what their occupation of embroidering flowers is to her:

> to a man like the Arab such beauty was only a flower casually plucked and carelessly thrown away. Whatever pleasures he might find among them, they were not those of friendship or society. When they were playing about him he looked on them with inattentive superiority: when they vied for his regard he sometimes turned away disgusted. As they had no knowledge, their talk could take nothing from the tediousness of life: as they had no choice, their fondness, or appearance of fondness, excited in him neither pride nor gratitude. . . .' (ch. XXXIX)

Pekuah's companionship pleases the Arab, but his intellectual condescension to her is emblematic of his arbitrary, presumptuous authority. He lectures her, for example, on the inevitability of "'misfortunes'" (ch. XXXIII), when it is his act of kidnapping which has caused her grief. Pekuah says that the Arab "'laughed at my credulity'" when she expects, on the basis of Imlac's

report, to see "'mermaids and tritons'" (ch. XXXIX). He instructs her in the science of astronomy, but her concentration is enforced: "an appearance of attention was necessary to please my instructor" (ch. XXXIX). The necessity for Pekuah to keep her wits about her that she may placate the Arab is in contrast to Nekayah's lassitude in a corresponding circumstance. Nekayah, like Pekuah, feels no impetus to study when parted from her companion: she "began to remit her curiosity, having no great care to collect notions which she had no convenience of uttering" (ch. XXXV). Rasselas is unsuccessful in his attempt to engage his sister's intellect: "he hired musicians, to whom she seemed to listen, but did not hear them, and procured masters to instruct her in various arts, whose lectures, when they visited her again, were again to be repeated" (ch. XXXV). Pekuah, however, is forced to remember her lessons, which is later to her advantage in her association with the astronomer. The greater expectation put upon her to please and accommodate another enlarges her usefulness: the nature of her intellectual efforts and the substance of her hard-won knowledge are secondary in importance to their application in her dealings with men.

Rasselas makes a strong case for the enlightenment, and not just the intellectual education, of women. Romantic conventions are exposed as fantastic, and as incapable of contributing to the stability of reasonable affection and rational occupation. The hollowness of romance is

exemplified in Pekuah's capture and imprisonment by the Arab, which has the elements, but does not fulfill the expectations, of romance. Nekayah, like Pekuah, gradually gains and contributes insight into the really insidious temper of idealized feminine objectification. She initially doubts the evidence that those living in obscurity and ignorance are incapable of fulfilling her picturesque expectations, absurdly maintaining a stubborn belief in the pastoral idyll despite her encounter with rude, dissatisfied, real shepherds. Nekayah imagines herself tenderly watching and caring for sheep in the company of anonymous female companions; the women--herself, as the central focus, excepted--and the animals alike assume the aspect of pleasant objects within her imaginary pastoral portrait. The princess

> could not believe that all the accounts of primeval pleasures were fabulous, and . . . hoped that the time would come, when, with a few virtuous and elegant companions, she should gather flowers planted by her own hand, fondle the lambs of her own ewe, and listen, without care, among brooks and breezes, to one of her maidens reading in the shade. (ch. XIX)

Ironically, Nekayah later chafes in her role of a sort of bored shepherdess as she languidly participates in the trivial lives of young women in "private houses": "With these girls she played as with inoffensive animals . . ." (ch. XXV). In Pekuah's description of the inconsequential lives of the Arab's concubines, which explodes any male pornographic romance about the seductiveness of the seraglio, there is again a dark suggestion that the women

are kept as domesticated animals:

> 'They ran from room to room, as a bird hops from wire to wire in his cage. They danced for the sake of motion, as lambs frisk in a meadow . . ..' (ch. XXXIX)

The mental processes both of young women in genteel homes and of subjugated concubines in an oriental harem manifest the degradation of their state[4]: they share the undirected transience of beasts. Nekayah remarks of the vapid women of the households she entered that "everything floated in their mind unconnected with the past or future, so that one desire easily gave way to another, as a second stone cast into the water effaces and confounds the circles of the first" (ch. XXV). Pekuah describes a similar aimlessness: "Part of their time passed in watching the progress of light bodies that floated on the river, and part in marking the various forms into which clouds broke in the sky" (ch. XXXIX). There is no pastoral felicity in such a setting; Pekuah has the status of a nurserymaid among them: they "could not read," and, like infants,

> 'They had no ideas but of the few things that were

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[4]Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, I, ed. Lord Wharncliffe (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1893) 178, 286. In a letter written during her courtship, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu comments bitterly that English women, having no control over their fortunes, "are sold like slaves; and I cannot tell you what price my master"--she refers to her father--"will put on me." Later, in "Letters during the Embassy to Constantinople," she frequently deflates the smug assumption that ladies in England enjoy liberty. She contrasts, for instance, the restrictive dress of her own country women to the ease and comfort enjoyed by her oriental hostesses in their clothes; when she shows them her stays, they suppose the article to be an instrument of feminine slavery, and assume that her husband has had her "locked up in that machine."

> within their view, and had hardly names for any thing but their cloaths and their food. As I bore a superiour character, I was often called to terminate their quarrels, which I decided as equitably as I could . . . the motives of their animosity were so small that I could not listen without intercepting the tale.' (ch. XXXIX)

Nekayah and Pekuah prefer the company and pursuits, directed by men, to which they are accustomed. The princess finds, during her enquiry, that "The daughters of many houses were airy and chearful, but Nekayah had been too long accustomed to the conversation of Imlac and her brother to be much pleased with childish levity and prattle which had no meaning" (ch. XXV). For Pekuah in the Arab's fortress, "'The diversions of the women,'" she says, "'were only childish play, by which the mind accustomed to stronger operations could not be kept busy. I could do all they delighted in doing by powers merely sensitive, while my intellectual faculties were flown to Cairo'" (ch. XXXIX).

The women demonstrate also an intelligence which is independent of their male instructors, and which they eventually apply to accomplish the welfare of the astronomer. Their native sensibilities are refined and expanded through experience. Nekayah, even before her educative researches, penetrates into truths by simple observation: she is, for instance, astute about the hermit, without his scholarly knowledge. His cottage includes "a book with pen and papers," and "mechanical instruments of various kinds" (ch. XXI). But the princess observed that "he had not the countenance of a man who had found, or could

teach, the way to happiness" (ch. XXI). And she undergoes a "tumult of grief and indignation" (ch. XX) on hearing the Bassa's plight. For her part, Pekuah's mental and moral scope increases during her time with the Arab: she learns about astronomy and about the disposition of the male ego. It is, therefore, significant that the characters react with a descending degree of gravity to Imlac's description of the astronomer's lunacy: "The prince heard this narration with very serious regard, but the princess smiled, and Pekuah convulsed herself with laughter" (ch. XLIII). The sage rebukes the women: "'Ladies, said Imlac, to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise . . . The princess was recollected, and the favourite was abashed" (ch. XLIII). Nekayah and Pekuah are to some extent, however, as justified as Rasselas in their reactions: the astronomer's monomania is absurd. The women insist on being brought together with the astronomer, apparently out of compassion as well as the desire for novelty: they "thought his character at once so amiable and so strange" (ch. XLVI). The women are insistent, the men pompous. Imlac balks at their project, but "The ladies would not be refused . . . ." (ch. XLVI). Rasselas rejects Imlac's initial ruse to bring Nekayah and Pekuah together with the astronomer, proposing that "'a man who . . . discovers he has been tricked by understandings meaner than his own'" (ch. XLVI) will be disillusioned with the human race thereafter. Rasselas's slur on the women's mental capabilities is reminiscent of

his pedantic rhetorical criticisms during his debate with Nekayah. And his precept is not congruent with his example here; he, after all, has plotted with Imlac to prevent Nekayah's entrance into a cloister. Finally, the irony of Rasselas's objection, when referring to a man who has in effect "tricked" himself into believing he controls the elements, is not unworthy of a "smile," or even of "convulsive laughter." Rasselas, that is, repeats the mistake of male pride.

Imlac quashes the women's mirth to stress the seriousness of the astronomer's condition; he is desirous that Rasselas' sententious observation should finally silence them : "no reply was attempted, and Imlac began to hope that their curiosity would subside . . ." (ch. XLVI). However, Pekuah devises an "honest pretence":

> she would solicite permission to continue under him [the astronomer] the studies in which she had been initiated by the Arab, and the princess might go with her either as a fellow-student, or because a woman could not decently come alone. (ch. XLVI)

Until now, Pekuah's choices of action have been stringently delimited. On leaving the Happy Valley, she "did not know whither she was going" (ch. XIV); at the pyramids, she is overcome by fear of apparitions, and then is captured by the Arabian band. In this instance, she is as determined to fulfill her mistress' desire of knowing the astronomer as Imlac is to prevent it. Imlac asserts, and Pekuah subverts, male arrogance with a directness which would not be seemly between the prince and princess, nor deferential in an

address to either of them. She responds to Imlac's sanctimonious suggestion to her--that the astronomer "will soon grow weary of your company" because she is not "a very capable auditress"--with a counter-snub:

> 'That, said Pekuah, must be my care: I ask of you only to take me thither. My knowledge is, perhaps, more than you imagine it, and by concurring always with his opinions I shall make him think it greater than it is.' (ch. XLVI)

Pekuah makes it clear that she intends to succeed with the astronomer by the deception of flattery, which smartly concedes to Imlac's and Rasselas's assertions that the astronomer will be conscious of his superiority to women. Indeed, her rank (he is "pleased to see himself approached with respect by persons of so splendid an appearance"), attentiveness ("her conversation took hold of his heart"), and surprising acquaintance with his subject ("he looked upon her as a prodigy of genius") have the desired effect upon him: "he found his thoughts grow brighter in their company; the clouds of solicitude vanished by degrees, as he forced himself to entertain them . . ." (ch. XLVI). The prince and princess "discovered to him their condition, together with the motives of their journey"; they make a further gesture of friendship and condescension when they "required his opinion on the choice of life":

> 'I have passed my time in study without experience. . . I have missed the endearing elegance of female friendship, and the happy commerce of domestick tenderness.' (ch. XLVI)

From the time of this confession, "the astronomer was received into familiar friendship, and partook of all their

projects and pleasures . . ." (ch. XLVI). The astronomer's sociability lends itself to his rehabilitation: Imlac finally counsels him to a properly sane perspective. Where Imlac's consistent sincerity about the vanity of life's choices offends the prince and princess until they recognize his wisdom, and where Imlac and Rasselas conspire to save Nekayah from voluntary seclusion, Pekuah and Nekayah cannily evade the presumptuous invocation of male authority. Using their powers of evaluation, characters act in the best interests of each other. The community is actually enhanced and instructed by the purposeful operation of clashing perspectives. The democracy of psychological development merges with the particular alliances formed through the subordination of age, sex, and rank to create the possibility of a moral equilibrium.

In Rasselas Johnson delineates, with startling and convincing precision, the sinister nature of romantic tableaux--the pastoral and the seraglio--and the oppressiveness of male pride. Both of these menaces have as their basis human psychological fallibility, the tendency to idealize the self, and can be circumvented by another aspect of this epistemological model: the brutal images and operation of power and fantasy can be reshaped by rational persuasion. Rasselas analyzes the actual evils women encounter in their mental and domestic lives, but indicates that women, if they participate in the creation of a sympathetic and reasonable domestic community, can initiate

an amelioration of their circumstances, to maintain the stability of feminine dignity and to preserve the imperative work of salvation.

## V. Feminine Radicalism and Bourgeois Polemics: Unhappy Marriage in Wollstonecraft's Mary and The Wrongs of Woman

Mary Wollstonecraft's two fictions advocate that women participate in the consolidation of the bourgeoisie to effect the general social good. According to the feminine protest of Mary and the radical quest for feminine reform in The Wrongs of Woman,[1] bourgeois women, given improved education and latitude to make decisions about themselves, can better and more happily serve as wives, mothers, and guardians of the lower classes. Wollstonecraft's conceptualization of women of her class remains consistent between her time as a restive but pious maiden governess as she writes Mary in 1788, and the time of her writing, nearly a decade later, of The Wrongs of Woman (1798) after a loss of religious faith, her work as a radical journalist and polemical champion of women, and her engagement in sexual unions first in revolutionary France with the American Gilbert Imlay (by whom she had a child), and then with the foremost English Jacobin thinker William Godwin. Margaret George, in One Woman's 'Situation,' concludes that Wollstonecraft's life and writings represent "one woman's demand for equal opportunity of self-creation"[2] within the framework of liberal individualism which, however, lacks a model for the self-creating bourgeois woman. This

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[1]Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, ed. James Kinsley and Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976). All further references will be to this text.

[2]Margaret George, One Woman's 'Situation': A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1970) 6.

problematic "identityless unknown"[3] characterizes the presentation of each of Wollstonecraft's bourgeois heroines: she does not place their rebellious individualism into any happy context. Her rhetoric affirms the progressive optimistic ideology of the male bourgeoisie, and deplores the effects of traditional ideas and institutions on women; at the same time, the fatalistic structures of misogynist fantasy, of feminine victimization, are entrenched in Wollstonecraft's literary imagination. In Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, a patina of radical social criticism overlays an affirmation, even a celebration, of the cultural tradition, hostile to women, which informs romantic convention. Wollstonecraft employs the affective quality of anti-feminist portraiture as a mode of appeal for a shift in emphasis in women's subordination. Her vindication of the rights of women is subverted by her deference to the conceptual gender distinctions of male discourse. She complies with the patriarchal definition of women according to their maternal function, which justifies their restriction to a private, domestic role--a role which ensures their subordination to men.[4]

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[3]George 170.

[4]Zillah R. Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, Longman Series in Feminist Literature (New York: Longman, 1981) 106-107. Wollstonecraft argues "for women's equality of opportunity within the context of the division of home life and political life that is proceeding forward in her century." In other words, Eisenstein elaborates, Wollstonecraft "wants to end the exclusion of women, as a sexual class, from the newly won liberal rights of the individual...." However, "Her demand to 'rationalize' motherhood involves a radical attack on feudal patriarchal ideology, but it also reestablishes motherhood as women's

Wollstonecraft's double view of women as members, on the one hand, of a monolithic sexual class, and as distinctive, original, inventive individuals on the other hand, is manifested in a gap between rhetorical modalities, between sentimental and polemical expression, which has the effect of romanticizing and denying social oppression. The self-conscious literariness of each of Wollstonecraft's fictions deflects from the galvanizing potential of her social criticism. Wollstonecraft's letters reveal that the argument of Mary is predicated on the situation of a woman of "genius"[5]; similarly, The Wrongs of Woman does not address the case of "an ordinary woman."[6] The heroines without question meet the challenge of benevolence and of reform: they are moral arbiters who valiantly tend the sick, defend the poor, and challenge social and legal institutions; but they suffer, all the while, the inevitable and peculiarly feminine complaints of chronic depression from parental neglect and the burden of unwanted husbands. In other words, the "narratable"[7] element in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman lies not in the heroines' occupations, which

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[4](cont'd) sphere in particularly bourgeois form."
[5]see Letter quoted in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, x.
[6]see Letter to George Dyson, quoted in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, 74.
[7]D. A. Miller, Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1981) ix. "'narratable': the instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise. The term is meant to cover the various incitements to narrative, as well as the dynamic ensuing from such incitements, and it is thus opposed to the 'nonnarratable' state of quiescence assumed by a novel before the beginning and supposedly recovered by it at the end."

are rational expressions of their feelings, but in their passions, which form their moral sense. The relationship between exemplary social performance and susceptibility to emotional distress works to fix women as defenseless yet valuable members of a strictly maternal citizenry. Wollstonecraft places great emphasis on the romantic oratory of a woman's poetic soul as the source of feminine grace and of society's salvation. Rhetorical force, not public action, constitutes feminine greatness; a concomitant frailty is necessary to effect women's influence. Wollstonecraft's heroines are gifted with a passionate literary sensibility which ennobles but which also exacerbates morbid excitability and quixotic imagination. The heroines' brave stance, their vocal defiance, is justified by the brilliance and the pathos of an exceptional feminine sensibility. Moreover, the ladies so formed are meant to occupy a rarefied, perhaps indefinable, and apparently unattainable, place in the social structure.

Mary and The Wrongs of Woman at once embody and counteract prevalent ideology about gender and class relations. Certainly the ability of Wollstonecraft's heroines to intervene in the social institutions so trenchantly analyzed is ultimately irrelevant to their welfare. Because an essential feminine nature is static in the face of the relativities of social existence, women's social power is, finally, of no consequence. Although Wollstonecraft uses the materials of autobiography and, in

The Wrongs of Woman particularly, of journalistic, documentary evidence to explode the cruel absurdities of male prejudice and female compliance, she asserts her acerbic, even axiomatic, observations within the context of sentimental fiction, which, in delineating the nature of "ladies" and their relationship to those in their sphere of influence, affirms ideas about women the writer condemns as demeaning: her use of feminine typology controverts her feminist radicalism. Wollstonecraft's heroines are fixed in the bathetic, titillating attitude of damsels in distress. They suffer from society's lack of faith in their virtuous feeling and sexual integrity as well as from the inevitable, incidental pain of transience. Dastardly fathers, husbands, and institutional authorities refuse to serve the interests of ladies, and those men who do serve are consumed by mortality: either way, when chivalry is dead, the lady is left high and dry. The emotional malaise of the heroines is the starting point of Wollstonecraft's incisive social criticism, but their "real life" predicament is eluded by their transcendent sensibilities: paradoxically, they are not caught in the immanence in which they are trapped, for while their strength of mind does not ameliorate the causes, shrewdly identified by Wollstonecraft, of their feminine bondage, their reflective intelligence allows them imaginative--one is tempted to say, imaginary--self-reliance. Feminine nature is, therefore, self-sufficient; male character is static, either

antipathetic or congenial but impotent. Because the social positions of the heroines are thus in effect identified with metaphysical absolutes--their romantic suffering and the solace of their infallible virtue are alike inevitable--the social hierarchy, the source of Wollstonecraft's explicit outrage, is, ironically, implicitly sanctioned.

Clearly the diffused focus of Wollstonecraft's texts detracts from her urgent radical thrust, and their insistent fatalism delimits the scope of the reader. But what might appear simply to be Wollstonecraft's formal literary deficiency--that the conventions of journalism and of romance sit awkwardly with each other--in fact reflects an insidious ideological concession. Wollstonecraft de-emphasizes the effects of gender bias in focusing on the sentimental exalted rhetoric of her abused heroines; their righteous indignation legitimates the self-serving social criticism which emanates from the male bourgeoisie.

Wollstonecraft is in the realist tradition of English writers who assert that their fictions are factual and therefore, because real, intentionally moral: fiction is truth, and truth, fiction.[8] She concurs as well with the

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[8]Lennard J. Davis, Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 221. "Novels work, then, by denying their own mode of production as mere fictions and also by creating the illusion through the use of the median past tense and mimetic techniques that the text is somehow close to--if not completely--reality. The frame of the novel insists the work is true while the technique of the novel aims at creating the illusion of reality. In effect, realism, as a technique, is a function of the ideological mode since it allows the work to refer to some 'reality' that is cut off from the actual historical continuum. In this sense, the text is 'cut loose from any

corollary of this authorial stance in censuring romantic literature as morally frivolous and lacking in aesthetic value, as she makes clear in the "Advertisement" to Mary and in the "Author's Preface" to The Wrongs of Woman. Mary is pointedly billed as "A Fiction" (Mary, Title Page) rather than as a novel, and it is posited that "Mary is in effect a criticism" of Mrs. H. Cartwright's sentimental novel The Platonic Marriage.' Wollstonecraft is critical of the imaginative excess of her women characters, and perceives her own fictions to be morally corrective. Reading and writing is for the heroines of Mary and The Wrongs of Woman a substitute for life; their fictional habits are enervating. Wollstonecraft in her prefaces explains that her writings are authoritative, and will enlighten rather than debilitate. The "Advertisement" to Mary claims that her fiction is invested with the conviction of genuine feeling and mind:

> In an artless tale, without episodes, the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers is displayed. The female organs have been thought too weak for this arduous employment; and experience seems to justify the assertion. Without arguing physically about possibilities--in a fiction, such a being may be allowed to exist; whose grandeur is derived from the operations of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source. (Mary, "Advertisement")

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'(cont'd) particular real conditions to which those representations refer.' Thus, like ideology, the novel's point of reference is not history, from which the novel stands autonomously aloof, but the social process of signification, the world of 'lived' as opposed to 'actual' experience. In this view, realism can be seen as a function of ideology and ideology can be seen as embodying the same processes as are used in the realistic novel."

'"Explanatory Notes," Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, 207.

Wollstonecraft does not quibble about "possibilities"; a reading of Mary will prove her contention that a woman may have "thinking powers," and highly innovative and satisfying ones at that. In the "Author's Preface" to The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft again proposes to tell an authentic, rather than a fantastic, story:

> In many works of this species, the hero is allowed to be mortal, and to become wise and virtuous as well as happy, by a train of events and circumstances. The heroines, on the contrary, are to be born immaculate; and to act like goddesses of wisdom, just come forth highly finished Minervas from the head of Jove. (73)

Wollstonecraft gains her point here, it seems, by taking a dig at simple-minded, Jove-like male authors. In each of these addresses, Wollstonecraft insists on the "novelty," the quality of avant-garde, inherent in her writing, which she perceives to lie in the transcription of the progress of passionate feeling and in a consequent rejection of stale or idealized representation. A formal analysis of each of Wollstonecraft's texts reveals that her modification of literary convention in fact seems to lie in her portrayal of "real," that is, documentable, circumstances for women--situations of domestic misery and the incidents of women's powerlessness in society. In depicting women and their "passions," however, she reproduces literary conventions which seduce readers into viewing women as objects, so that her fictions are artifacts of the misogyny they criticize.

Wollstonecraft's heroines are middle-class ladies who undergo the range of gothic feeling--from the sublime to the beautiful--in response to eighteenth-century social conditions. Although the action of Mary and The Wrongs of Woman occurs within a contemporary, rather than an exotic, medieval time, Wollstonecraft complies with gothic expectations in another important respect, since in each fiction profound reaction to landscape, topography, and architecture signals exquisite sensibility. The aesthetic stance of Wollstonecraft's characters is related, however, though in a very qualified way, to her political topic. For her protagonists, the sentimental consciousness of surroundings includes sensitivity to social setting, both native and foreign. In Mary, the heroine finds much to criticize in the English countryside, in fashionable pleasure spots, and in London, as well as her travels to Portugal. Similarly, the prejudices of England and America alike are excoriated in The Wrongs of Woman. The international, universal scope of social corruption contributes to the heroines' regret. They are disappointed in love, friendship, benevolence, and an unjust world. Yet the heroines, though persistently victimized, are never crushed, because their worldly concerns are detached from the freedom of their souls in imaginative reverie. Their strength of feeling is prior, making them exaggeratedly vulnerable yet triumphantly impenetrable to pain. The paradox of their feminine distress is inescapable and even

undesirable, since their endurance determines their worth.

The predictable relationship between incident and outcome, cause and effect, means that the accretion of episodes in which the heroines are threatened or thwarted is, finally, merely sensationalism. The plots have an irrelevant momentum further characterized by gothic voyeurism, Wollstonecraft presents her heroines pruriently, in unconscious poses and heightened emotional states. The objectification of the autobiographical heroines in Mary and in The Wrongs of Woman, and, in The Wrongs of Woman, the self-objectification of the heroine within her memoirs--meant for her daughter, but read by her lover--is a modality verging on the pornographic: the reflective energy of the texts depicts, under the guise of instruction, the abuse of resistant women in a series of stylized "trials." Even in The Wrongs of Woman, where Wollstonecraft not only records her life and opinions, as she does in Mary, but also includes a synopsis of the effects on women of "the partial laws and customs of society" (The Wrongs of Woman 73), the narration of scandal and spectacle opposes the impulse to edify. The confessions of the protagonists, and their denunciation of involvement in criminal activity, recall the didactic prurience of published gallows confessions and fictionalized criminal tales.[10] Declarations of the "last

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[10]Davis 234. Davis cites as examples Spiro Peterson, ed., The Counterfeit Lady and Other Criminal Fiction of the Seventeenth-Century England (Garden City, New York: Archer, 1961), and John Dunton, The Night Walker: or Evening Rambles in Search After Lewd Women (October, 1969) No. 1.

words" of criminals "permit paradoxically the lawbreaker to become the law-affirmer, the liar to become the speaker of final truths, and the thief to become the giver of good advice."[11] Wollstonecraft's radical departure from the conventions of that genre lies in her inversion, or, at least, in her drastic qualification, of the guilt of the protagonists; the evidence adduced from their autobiographical depositions does not prove the confesser's culpability so much as that of their legally protected persecutors/prosecutors. At the same time, the lurid accounts of sexual encounters and psychic dread satisfy the expectations of horrid criminal revelations. The conjoining of feminine propaganda with feminine exhibition in Mary is compounded in The Wrongs of Woman. In both fictions, the oppression of virtue is not moral, but it is exciting, which makes engaging Wollstonecraft's otherwise dreary thesis: women should strive for the rectitude of sexual autonomy so that their moral integrity will be viable and the purity of their feelings will be beyond reproach; the pursuit of sexual fulfillment, however, is futile.

The occasion and closure of Mary and The Wrongs of Woman appear to depart from the prevalent conventions of either comedy or tragedy, each of which conceptualizes feminine chastity and sexual subordination through marriage as a teleological necessity. However, Wollstonecraft's thematically innovative premises contain a sexual threat to

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[11]Davis 126.

the heroines customary in novels. Fictional heroines are usually depicted with their backs literally or metaphysically against the wall, face to face with a rake/rapist; Wollstonecraft's heroines are married ladies unwillingly backed up through the door of the domestic bedroom. But although in Wollstonecraft's fictions the male intruder is the heroine's own husband, so that Wollstonecraft in her depiction of feminine defiance would seem to be arguing from the standpoint of individualism, and to be upholding the physical and moral inviolability of a lady, the design of Mary and The Wrongs of Woman confirms the mystique of feminine chastity. Neither fiction ends in the definitive reconciliation of a husband and wife, or of a woman and her pursuer; nor do they end with the tragic death of a ravaged or compromised heroine. Rather, the closure of Mary and the tentative closure of The Wrongs of Woman, a fragment--Wollstonecraft's husband and editor, Godwin, published her notes projecting the possible ending to her novel--are schematically identical, and are in effect the exceptions which prove the rule of literary convention: in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman happiness is deferred, and suffering is protracted, for the heroines.

Wollstonecraft's title, Mary, is eponymous; it has, ironically, the resonance of a blackly humourous pun: the imperative "marry" describes the dilemma of Mary, the Virgin Wife. She prefers the grave, or hell, to her husband's advances:

> when her husband would take her hand, or mention any thing like love, she would instantly feel a sickness, a faintness at her heart, and wish, involuntarily, that the earth would open and swallow her. (67)

The concluding sentence of Mary indicates that the heroine awaits a divine affirmation of her chastity:

> She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage.[12] (Mary 68)

For Mary's mother, the reading of silly novels distracts from her insipid conjugal life. Mary's reading of the Biblical text is quintessentially escapist, and is not endorsed, although the narrative justifies the heroine's physical disgust of her husband. At the same time, the renunciation of her lawful husband and her insoluble predicament as a chaste, unhappy wife lends itself to a romantic sanctification of her. Mary, like Richardson's Pamela, is in the nature of a sentimental hagiography in its celebration of the heroine's resolute celibacy, of her determination not to submit to a man who has no moral right to her body. Pamela and Mary are both tales of sexual fortitude, except that in Mary the comic punchline--felicitous sexual union--never occurs. And in her implicit innocence, imminent otherworldly destiny, and in Wollstonecraft's peculiar maudlin insistence on the maternal quality of her charity, Mary is not so much a Pamela-like paragon as a Madonna.

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[12] Matthew 22:30. "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

Reading, for Maria, the heroine of The Wrongs of Woman, is the locus of quixotic sexual feeling. She is fired by the stranger Darnford's "marginal notes" (85) to his books, and by her association of him with her impression of Rousseau's St. Preux (89). Darnford is imagined as ideal; reading does not enhance but confuses Maria's judgement. Moreover, her rhetorical inventiveness is inefficacious. She relinquishes the writing of rhapsodies in favour of instructional memoirs (82), which she goes on to at least briefly regret as a substitute for action. Finally, Maria's public "paper" (195), read in court by proxy, is valiantly and cogently expressed, but the basis of her impassioned rhetoric is dismissed by the judge: "'What virtuous woman thought of her feelings?'" (199) Maria's ability to persuade, to inspire conviction, arises not from her intellectual receptivity and literary genius, but from the felt presence of her passionate nature. Feelings are expressive, but not expressible. During Maria's unjust imprisonment in a madhouse, her curiously constituted guard, Jemima, a terribly abused pariah who is yet well-read, canny, and responsive, is moved by Maria's "persuasive eloquence of grief" (79) in her condition as a bereaved mother. Maria implores Jemima to assist her to, she says,

> look at me--observe me closely, and read my very soul. . . Jemima had not power to resist this persuasive torrent. . .. (121)

Maria resurrects Jemima's dead heart, and Jemima goes on to insist on voluntary servitude to her, "on being considered

as her house-keeper and to receive the customary stipend. On no other terms would she remain with her friend" (191). Maria is bolstered, not by the anachronism of "sisterhood," but rather by the conviction of womanly devotion, inspired by the genteel, maternal example of Maria herself. This triumph of conversion is singular: Maria's husband Venables is intransigent, and her lover Darnford, though receptive in her presence, is inconstant, it will turn out, after a separation from her. Moral sympathy would seem to be communicated physically rather than intellectually; Maria's rhetoric, to be effectively relayed, must be personally voiced, and constancy must be sustained by corporeal magnetism. The heroine's dignifying rational function is an insufficient influence.

Maria's original moral thought gains her nothing publicly or privately. (Indeed, her assertiveness leaves her as publicly disgraced and as privately defeated as a woman governed by sensuality.) Her resistance to the logic and argument of English jurisprudence or to the strictures of ecclesiastical law is gallant but futile. She performs her own rite of divorce after Venables schemes to prostitute her:

> "Yes--equally lost to delicacy and principle--you dared sacrilegiously to barter the honour of the mother of your child."
> Then, turning to Mr. S--- the proposed client, I added, "I call on you, Sir, to witness," and I lifted my hands and eyes to heaven, "that, as solemnly as I took his name, I now abjure it," I pulled off my ring, and put it on the table; "and that I mean immediately to quit his house, never to enter it more." (162)

Her declaration of freedom is not publicly recognized and "the dogs of law were let loose on her" (199). Maria subsequently engages in a self-styled marriage to Darnford: "As her husband she now received him . . ." (188). Just as she has spurned her first husband with highly charged liturgical language, so she privately invokes another fiat to sanctify her union with Darnford: "she called him by the sacred name of 'husband'. . ." (p. 190). But again, her language is not performative. Her verbal declaration accomplishes neither a repudiation nor a confirmation of the articles of religious or juridical contract: she cannot will changes in her marital status. Despite Darnford's ceremonial vows--"he solemnly pledged himself as her protector--and eternal friend" (188) -- Maria's sexual regeneration is transient. According to Wollstonecraft's "plan of the remainder of the work" (201), Maria will endure the repetition of a husband's sexual betrayal ("Her lover unfaithful" 202) and of her own emotional breakdown. She will commit suicide, or else attempt suicide and be revived by the saving grace of motherhood on the re-introduction of her child, thought dead: "I will live for my child!" (203) Maria's infallible conscience, virtuous feeling, and sexual martyrdom protect her from the charge of being a Fallen Woman. She is if anything a New Eve, impeccably chaste, and a consummate mother, languishing in the absence of the New Jerusalem.

I

Wollstonecraft's heroine in Mary is a sort of unwitting caricature of the eighteenth-century ideal English lady, of the chaste wife, bountiful mistress, and capable manager: Mary is a married virgin who eagerly seizes the role of the tender vigilant mother for friends, tenants, and even the urban poor. In The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft answers the gothic absence of order and meaning, as well as the impotence of language and men to rectify social injustice, with the construction of another exaggeratedly pure, spontaneous, alienated heroine, a neglected yet potentially affective agent of radical domestic and social transformation.

In Mary the feminine figures typical of a variety of eighteenth-century literary modes--the fashionable lady, mocked by satirists; the poor, broken-hearted lady found in jejune sentimental novels; Roman Catholic nuns, enduring enforced, sterile piety ("Wrapped up in themselves, the nuns only thought of inferior gratifications" [29]), described by derogatory travel writers--are set up as straw women to be knocked down by the example of the heroine: Mary is serious, fervent, and inspired. But she is not merely idealized; she is sanctified. Mary is narcissistically aggrandized by the oblique association of the enigma of her superior nature and uniquely complex experience with the divine virtues and heroicism of the Gospels. The result is a confusion of frustrated sexual passion with religious passion, and of conjugal celibacy with Christian martyrdom.

Mary's character is the obverse of that of her impure and impious mother, Eliza. Eliza's husband Edward is a godless, brutish country squire; Eliza, delicate and languorous, yet carnal, is, perversely, a suitable match. Indeed, the acrimonious sarcasm of the opening pages of Mary, which describe the false elegance of Eliza's disposition and pursuits, goes some way to make Eliza the butt of a bitter version of Pope's graceful satire in The Rape of the Lock.'[3] Eliza, that is, shares the vanity and idle occupations of Pope's unmarried Belinda; moreover, Eliza, educated to be insipid, does not so much dwindle into a wife as into one of Pope's "Airy" "Spirits,"[4] busy with trivial and ineffectual attempts to preserve feminine chastity. Eliza's novels serve as "delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation"; they satisfy the requirements of "the animal soul" (2). Her fondness for the silly novel, The Platonic Marriage, is an extreme irony, since Eliza's marriage, while not blissful, is certainly not platonic; she gives birth several times (4). Neither does Eliza engage in extra-marital romance, although she is only nominally chaste:

> she did not make any actual faux pas. . . But then, to make amends for this seeming self-denial, she read all the sentimental novels. . . (3)

Meanwhile, Edward beds down his "pretty," "ruddy" (1) tenant women, preferring them to Eliza's "sickly" (2) demeanour.

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[3]Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London: Metheun and Co., 1941). All further references will be to this text.

[4]Pope, "Dedication," ll. 41, 29.

Eliza's charitable and maternal duties are neglected in favour of lustful reading. Later, Eliza still "vegetating" (6), Edward, "over a bottle" (12), arranges a marriage for the unwilling Mary. The maiden state of those dependent on Eliza, the daughters of the estate, and her own daughter, is unprotected, and her own matrimonial fidelity as well as her social role is vitiated.

Eliza is deluded by inappropriate attention to books, both of fiction and of revelation. She undertakes a mawkish identification with the banal heroines of sentimental fiction: "She planted, in imitation of those susceptible souls, a rose bush . . ."(3). She in her ignorance and indolence hastens the fate of her own imperilled soul; her physical decline is not a consequence of romantic adventure, but of, finally, "want of exercise" and the failure to suckle children (she suffers "two or three milk-fevers" [4]). Eliza's devotional reading and attendance to liturgy is mechanical, and by rote ("she said long prayers--and sometimes read her Week's Preparation" [2]), and she has a vague dread of a hellish underworld, of "that horrid place . . . the region below" (2). Her mind is characterized by phantasmic confusion; she is so vapid as to be ghost-like.

Preoccupied as she is with the rituals of her dressing table (she reads while having her hair dressed; when "she could turn her eyes from the glass" [2]), and devoted to lap-dogs and "the card table" (4), Eliza is reminiscent of Pope's heroine, Belinda. Like her literary predecessor,

Eliza is sacrilegiously absorbed by frippery and her own mirror image; she is seduced by

> The glare of lights, the studied inelegancies of dress, and the compliments offered up at the shrine of false beauty. (2)

The narrator's acerbic speculation as to Eliza's place within a superstitious cosmology recalls the operation of the more fanciful universe in The Rape of the Lock:

> whether her's was a mounting spirit, I cannot pretend to determine; or what sort of a planet would have been proper for her, when she left her material part in this world, let metaphysicians settle; I have nothing to say to her unclothed spirit. (2)

The self-preoccupation and irreligion of the ladies in Pope's poem reduce them to mock-heroic status, and even, on their deaths, to the machinery of mock-epic as they assume the form of invisible spirits. Eliza before marriage possesses "negative good nature," attends only "to the shews of things," and is indeed "a mere machine" (1). She is, moreover, invisible to her husband: "in London, they . . . seldom saw each other"; in the country, her husband ignores "his wife's countenance, which even rouge could not enliven . . . Her voice was but the shadow of a sound, and she had, to complete her delicacy, so relaxed her nerves, that she became a mere nothing" (1-2). Lacking moral substance, Eliza is but a shadowy resemblance of a real wife, mother, and mistress. She is indifferent to "the duties of her station," and "thought not of death, though on the borders of the grave" (4). She hovers, useless, between the necessary work of earthly existence and the entrance to the Christian

afterlife.

The narrator of Mary assumes the role more of a pathologist than a poet in this analysis of feminine folly. The powerful property of feminine virtue is undermined by debilitating feminine melancholy: women's emotional and bodily weakness impairs the point of the narrator's moral anger at social conventions. That is to say, the highly prescriptive severity of Wollstonecraft's allusive treatment of Eliza, muddled and delinquent, does not establish the basis of an integrated formal and instructive design. Ann, Mary's friend, has true gentility; Mary achieves remarkable theological and social advances. Yet they, like Eliza, die prematurely, doomed, ironically, by the same sensible intelligence which distinguishes them from her. The younger women are distinguished from the older one by the self-consciousness of their misery.

Ann is a different sort of foil than Eliza to Mary, although, as we have seen, all three characters share a damaging susceptibility to imaginative feeling. Ann's sentimental temperament and her pathetic circumstances are, unlike Eliza's, genuine. She is a victim of unrequited love and reduced circumstances; she is prey to the memory of her undeclared lover, whose "image floated on her imagination," and to "the ghastly phantom, poverty" (13). Her health succumbs to these stresses, despite Mary's constant ministrations. After Ann's death, Mary recalls that Ann has acknowledged her as her "guardian angel," and goes on to

address Ann's "spirit" with assurance: "Tell me, thou soul of her I love . . .whither art thou fled?" (43) Ann merely concedes Mary's extraordinary charity, while Mary fervently expresses her faith in the immortality of her friend's soul. Ann's tragedy is important chiefly because it occasions the exertion of Mary's superior native endowments and spiritual apprehensions. In addition, their diverse sensibilities account for Mary's more interesting romantic situation.

Ann's aesthetic preferences betray a sweetly gentle understanding; she is impressed by the beauties of composition, whereas Mary appreciates as well "the flights of genius, or abstracted speculations" (13) of literary works. Mary's taste for the sublime manifests itself in her psychic and bodily courage. On their sea voyage to Lisbon, "the sight of the water terrified" Ann. Mary, on the other hand, "surveyed the boundless expanse before her with delight" (20). Mary's cast of mind, that is, accounts for her remarkable fortitude and, ultimately, for her extraordinary capacity for good works; Mary's qualities surpass in every way those of her tender friend. She is a prodigy, at once more substantial and more ethereal than Ann. For instance, Ann pursues a course of noble self-denial, but without success: "She denied herself every little comfort; things that would be no sacrifice when a person is well, are absolutely necessary to alleviate bodily pain, and support the animal functions" (13). This is in contrast to Mary, who "did not fear bodily pain; and when

her mind was agitated, she could endure the greatest fatigue without appearing sensible of it" (32); "when her understanding or affections had an object, she almost forgot she had a body which required nourishment" (12). For Ann, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak: "her strength was not equal to her spirits" (32).

Ann is impelled towards death when a young landed gentleman, who had stolen "imperceptibly her heart" (7), forgets her on the death of her benefactor, a clergyman. The conditions of Mary's romantic frustration supersede those of her mother's derivative imagination--Eliza wallows in the fatuous details of The Platonic Marriage --and subsumes those of Ann's more prosaic platonic disappointment. Mary's Henry, meant to be a clergyman (34), becomes a paternal benefactor to Mary; unlike Ann's companion, however, Henry declares his devotion. Mary is present at his deathbed: she is not abandoned, but bereft. Mary's subsequent decline derives from her loss of the one in all the world who has responded to her intellectual passion ("'Dear enthusiastic creature,' whispered Henry, 'how you steal into my soul!'" [40]); he is moved by her deeply-felt if inadequately expressed theological convictions. Henry

> saw she was determined, and that these sentiments were not the effusion of the moment, but well digested ones, the result of strong affections, a high sense of honour, and respect for the source of all virtue and truth. He was startled, if not entirely convinced by her arguments; indeed her voice, her gestures were all persuasive. (41)

She is inscrutably wise; as in the case of Wollstonecraft's

other heroine, Mary's affective quality lies in her sympathetic energy. Henry is engaged by her surprising forcefulness, and not by the propositions of her rhapsodic philosophy or her talent for debate. Wollstonecraft suggests, that is, that the justice or truth of rhetoric is irrelevant if virtue "shows through" speech: persuasion itself is radical. That Mary's--and Maria's--heart and mind are superior is assumed rather than established.

Wollstonecraft's conceptual vagueness concerning the virtue of her heroine's mind can be perceived in the instance of the parallel circumstances but divergent evaluations of Mary and a gentleman acquaintance in England. Mary, like Henry, is moved to respond, though in the privacy of her writing, "in a train of reflections" (55), to a man whose conversation she finds fascinating yet lacking in substantive coherence. She is, however, unimpressed:

> He talked often of the beauty of virtue; but not having any solid foundation to build the practice on, he was only a shining, or rather a sparkling character: and though his fortune enabled him to hunt down pleasure, he was discontented. (55)

Further, although the man is, like her, brilliant and compassionate, he is vain and "by no means a useful member of society" (55); he does not share Mary's devotion to unpretending service. She believes his lassitude in public affairs and his personal unhappiness to be accountable to a moral deficiency, a failure to espouse an ennobling Christianity. She explains her idea in the rather affected terms of an extended conceit, likening the power of Gospel

revelation to gravity, to "the laws of attraction," without which "eccentric characters" are produced; and when the light of the Gospel is "obscured by passion," "the bewildered soul" is forced to "fly into void space, and wander in confusion" (56). But Ma[illegible]s not implicated in her own critical diagnosis of irreg[illegible]habits and opinions. Her insistence on a separation from her husband is not "eccentric," but high-minded delicacy ("'I cannot see him; he is not the man formed for me to love'" [39]); her "wandering" from place to place, and the confusion of her feverish, disordered thoughts, are not a signal of reprobate passion, but are the necessary consequence of ineffable sympathy. Following an interview with Henry, when he assures her he is about to die, Mary wanders outdoors, late at night, barely conscious of herself:

> she crept along, regardless of the descending rain; when lifting up her eyes to heaven, and then turning them wildly on the prospects around, without marking them; she only felt that the scene accorded with her present state of mind . . . Where am I wandering, God of Mercy! she thought; she alluded to the wanderings of her mind. (62)

After Henry's death, Mary travels widely and restlessly, both in England (66) and abroad, and energetically undertakes sophisticated industrial and agricultural enterprises, and the fulfillment of comprehensive social work:

> Mary visited the continent, and sought health in different climates; but her nerves were not to be restored to their former state. She then retired to her house in the country, established manufactories, threw the estate into small farms . . . She visited the sick, supported the old, and educated the young.

(67)

Haunted (67) by her past, she haunts the present while passively awaiting her death: "She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage" (68). Eliza's desire is carnal; Ann is vulnerable to the ravages of sexual frustration; Mary rejects the life of the body: she longs to be pure spirit. In a symbolic rite of platonic marriage, she receives "the sacrament with" the dying Henry, "as a bond of union which was to extend beyond the grave" (64). She looks forward to a reunion, which will again be devoid of sex, with Henry in heaven (61).

Mary's intuitive feeling compels her to reject commonplace ideas of woman's place, and of her conjugal duty. It is the natural purity of her thought which lends itself to her rebellion against conventions regarding her sex. Mary's unusual life is predicated on and justified by her intellectual isolation rather that on her abject feminine circumstances. The power of Mary's feeling is such that she is not susceptible to social forces which shape other women, to begin with. Eliza's weakness and Edward's nasty temper are correctives rather than models of Mary's behavior; she views their wrong-doings more in sorrow than in anger. She patiently and thanklessly honours her father and mother; Mary fulfills commandments on her own initiative. Indeed the heroine is, in matters of religion, self-sufficient, and does not require instruction, but even considers "points of doctrine" independently on "perusing

the scriptures" (11). Her parents' neglect of her as a child is actually conducive to Mary's rational development and the enhancement of her soul: she is pristine in her solitude. Mary naturally possesses womanly attributes, including lady-like accomplishments which she devotes to the service of heaven. Unlike Eve in Milton's Eden, she undertakes to converse with "angels" (4), and is both literary and musical, "making verses, and singing hymns of her own composing" (11). She is not in need of male government, of subjection to a dominating "Adam:" the "various movements of her mind were not commented upon, nor were the luxuriant shoots restrained by culture" (12). So when Mary goes on to be unhappily married, like Eliza, she will not be, like her mother, a submissive wife. Neither does she foresee, as Milton does, the delights of angelic intercourse; she trusts that in heaven there will be no marriage (68).

Although Mary never gives birth, her tenderness surpasses that of any mother she encounters. These are variously poor and helpless (a nursery servant's mother is "obliged to leave her sick child while she earned her daily bread" [6]), or in straitened circumstances and lacking intellectual force (Ann's mother is "not calculated to banish, by her trivial, uninteresting chat, the delirium in which her daughter was lost" [13]), or callous (the "poor woman" Mary rescues at sea is so "Full of her own danger, she scarcely thought of her child till that was over" [47]), or, in the case of Henry's mother, and Mary's mother,

indifferent, if finally penitent--Eliza on her own deathbed, and Henry's mother, as Henry approaches his. All of these women are, like Ann, for whom Mary feels "'an affection very like a maternal one'" (19), the recipients of Mary's incomparable services as benefactor and/or nurse; none of them comprehends the extent of her virtuous feeling. Mary does not find in Ann, who is despondent, "the companion she looked for" (17). The "ingratitude" of the poor "hurt her" (51). Only Henry perceives the greatness of her soul. Mary exhibits the characteristics of the Virgin Mary; Henry is venerated as the single worthy object of her humble, whole-hearted devotion: the inference is intriguing. Mary is not merely good, but holy; her platonic "marriage" is not merely sacred, but divine.

Mary's animating sympathy is maternal, and incites her to imitate the work of the Gospels. She grieves as a girl for the Lazarus-like figures "driven from the gate without being relieved" (6-7). When Mary witnesses the body of a child suicide, a girl who is a servant in her mother's house, her horror is converted to the promise of a mission of service:

> the bleeding corpse presented itself to her when she first began to slumber. Tortured by it, she at last made a vow, that if she was ever mistress of a family she would herself watch over every part of it. (6)

The silent reproach of a slaughtered lamb, of a self-slaughtered innocent, leads her to pledge an improving, domestic supervision. As it is, before she ever attains the

responsibilities of womanhood, "the servants and the poor adored her" (12). Mary grows up to be a consummate nurse and caretaker of the poor, even of those beyond her home estate. "Her knowledge of physic" (51), for example, enables her to resurrect a dying, destitute mother "in one of the villages near London" (49); her restorative cure is miraculous: "Mary saw her rising as it were from the grave" (51). Her triumph with the unknown feminine Lazarus occurs, ironically, on her return from Portugal after her attempt to save her beloved, ailing friend Ann has failed. Yet she in her determination to save Ann resembles the Hebrew prophet Daniel, who braves the threat of the lion's pit to pray to his God: "to snatch her from the very jaws of destruction--she would have encountered a lion" (15). Mary actively defends the helpless because she remains alive to the insights of her contemplative religious impulses. At an early age, Mary sees her "Creator" in "Nature"; she would "stand and behold the waves rolling, and think of the voice that could still the tumultuous deep" (10). In episodes of sturm and drang, Mary proves not to be one of little faith; on her voyage back to England from Lisbon, during a tempest,

> In a little vessel in the midst of such a storm she was not dismayed; she felt herself independent. (45)

Then, having written a prayerful reflection, she "serenely delivered her soul into the hands of the Father of Spirits" (45). During another storm on the water, with the fatally ill Henry, Mary again feels no bodily fear, but wishes "to have sought with him a watry grave" (60); she longs, that

is, to be united in death. The resonant context of her desire suggests that her reverence and its object are superhuman.

Unlike the apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mary can keep a faithful vigil:

> The night before the important day, when she was to take on herself her baptismal vow, she could not go to bed; the sun broke in on her meditations, and found her not exhausted by her watching. (11)

Later, she translates her act of faith into a charitable deed when she bravely and compassionately maintains a solitary attendance, oppressed by ominous weather, at her profligate father's deathbed:

> The nurse fell asleep, nor did a violent thunderstorm interrupt her repose, though it made the night appear still more terrific to Mary . . . Night after night Mary watched. (18)

Mary, here more sensitive and more useful than a professional nurse, goes on to show more fortitude than Henry's mother when Henry dies: his mother leaves the room during the last moments, whereas "Mary waited to see him die" (65). She is unwaveringly faithful to the son of god and his father, her "benefactor" (11); so she remains true at her station by Henry, the only beloved son of a widow, and Mary's freely chosen "father." Rapturous compensation for her loveless childhood, enforced marriage, and futile benevolence is found in Henry's filial, platonic proposal:

> Her heart longed to receive a new guest . . . He had called her his dear girl; the words might have fallen from him by accident; but they did not fall to the ground. My Child! His child! . . . If I had had a father, such a father! (35-36)

Mary's phrasing echoes a Biblical description of faithful receptivity: "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."[15] Mary's passion for Henry is informed by her Christian piety.

Romance is the tenor rather than the vehicle of each of Wollstonecraft's fictional works. Wollstonecraft brings into relief one dimension of the heroines--their determining love for a man; this reduces the complexity of their predicaments to a matter of the need for a strong male protector. After Henry's death, Mary remains socially active, but passively awaits her entrance into the joys of heavenly celibacy. In The Wrongs of Woman, the heroine, Maria, has the power, not available to men, to extend the transforming benefits of her refined consciousness to create a private, domestic sympathy. Like Mary, she is determined by frustrated sexual passion. The religious theme of Mary and the political arguments of The Wrongs of Woman are subject to the reduction of women's experience to the simple binary opposition between a lady's quality and her undeserved fate in love. This crude conception of women's victimization enforces rather than interrupts the traditional ideological standpoint towards women.

Wollstonecraft argues for an expansion of dignified educational possibilities for women even as she implicitly restricts them to service within the private realm. Certainly Maria's pointed attacks on the systemic logic of

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[15]Samuel 3:19.

women's oppression are clear-eyed:

> 'By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, the fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as a proof of the inferiority of their intellect.' (137)

However, her reforming interest lies primarily in the improvement of feminine reason, and she asserts that no great measure of personal liberty is necessary to cultivate it:

> Freedom of conduct has emancipated many women's minds; but my conduct has most rigidly been governed by my principles, till the improvement of my understanding has enabled me to discern the fallacy of prejudices at war with nature and reason. (156)

Within such an ideological context, the problem of man's inhumanity to woman, although protested in exclamatory rhetoric -- "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (79)--is spurious: the genteel superiority of the rational bourgeois lady within her domestic sphere indicates, if vaguely, the remedy for things as they are. The wrongs of woman are an opportunity for self-righteous feminine display.

Wollstonecraft attacks the effects of sexual hierarchy and defends the superiority of the ascribed feminine function to foster domestic sympathy. Indeed the polarity between radical feminine good and male evil assumes a Manichean significance in the highly contrived story of Maria's marital strife. Therefore, in a written address to a public court, Maria can declare that

> 'nature revolts, and my soul sickens at the bare supposition, that it could ever be a duty to pretend

> affection, when a separation is necessary to prevent my feeling hourly aversion.' (197)

However, Maria's memoir and "paper" (195) histrionically restate rather than advance the measured pronouncement against glaring legal and conventional double-standards in marriage voiced by Maria's sensible, moneyed mentor and uncle, according to whom a woman is justified in separating from her husband if he "'merits neither her love, nor her esteem'" (157). The uncle is regarded by Maria as a paternal figure and a surrogate husband: he is, she says, "My more than father" (156); he wishes to "adopt" (179) Maria's daughter; and she is "widowed" (180) by his death. The uncle, like Henry in Mary, is ailing, impeccable, fatherly, and chivalrous--a courtly, celibate alternative to the vulgar necessity of remaining within an unhappy marriage. Maria's unorthodox ideas on the subject of divorce are endorsed by her upright male relative. Bereft of his protection after his death, Maria is left to bravely pursue her uncle's moral imperative that to submit to a bad husband "'is an abjectness of condition, the enduring of which no concurrence of circumstances can ever make a duty in the sight of God or just men'" (157). Her dramatic demand of the court is made with reference to the male authority of the moral judgement and legal testament of her uncle/father/husband, and as proof of her inviolable feminine-bourgeois integrity:

> 'I claim then a divorce, and the liberty of enjoying free, from molestation, the fortune left to me by a relation, who was well aware of the character of the

> man with whom I had to contend.' (198)

The stylized presentation of Venables as an anti-hero assaulting Maria's feminine dignity provides occasions for her heightened, offended feeling. Because Maria's aesthetic sense is equated with moral sense, she is ennobled and aggrandized rather than mortified by Venables' impositions and brutality. Indeed, since her psychic vulnerability and anguish are evidence of her true worth, her debasement allows her to be heroic. But the temperamental softness which accounts for her benevolence and sensitivity also stymies her attempts to resolve her difficulties: she leaves Venables only to enter a disappointing liaison with Darnford.

Maria discovers, having initially perceived Venables before marriage as a sensible paragon--he dissembles "delicacy" and "benevolence" (135) to ingratiate himself--that her husband has the attributes of a larger-than-life stage-villain. The hypocritical Venables, known "'on 'Change as a swindler'" (160), and who forges Maria's name on "bills" (191), is guilty of even worse corrupt bargaining: he attempts to prostitute Maria. That he accuses his indignant wife of theatricality is ironic, since she is forced to spurn him in response to his dastardly plots:

> 'Very pretty, upon my soul! very pretty, theatrical flourishes! Pray, fair Roxana, stoop from your altitudes, and remember that you are acting a part in real life.' (166)

Roxana is of course a vengeful wife in Nathaniel Lee's The

Rival Queens; Lee, who was popularly associated with Bedlam and madness,[16] refers, in the dedication to his play, to his "wild, unthinking, dissolute Age; an Age whose Business is senseless Riot, Neronian Gambols, and ridiculous Debauchery."[17] Significantly, then, after Maria refuses further compliance in Venables' encroachment on her property and person, Venables, a libertine, commits her to an insane asylum.

In addition to Venables' alliance with a dramatic type, he is allusively rendered as a character in Hogarth's painterly design. It has been noted[18] that Maria's portrait of Venables, degenerate and in dishabille, is a verbal copy of the intemperate, dishevelled husband in the second frame of Marriage a la Mode:

> I think I now see him lolling in an arm-chair, in a dirty powdering-gown, soiled linen, ungartered stockings, and tangled hair, yawning and stretching himself. (147)

This iconography is reflected in a second, partial portrait, remarkable for the way in which Venables' physicality looms suddenly, ghost-like, within Maria's description of her uneasy submission to his sexual attentions:

> There was something of delicacy in my husband's bridal attentions; but now his tainted breath, pimpled face, and blood-shot eyes, were not more repugnant to my senses, than his gross manners, and loveless familiarity to my taste. (154)

He appears before her in this recollection as though

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[16] Jean H. Hagstrum, Sex and Sensibility (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 82. "He was in and out of Bedlam," and "His age regarded him as insane."
[17] Quoted in Hagstrum 82.
[18] "Explanatory Notes," 225.

hovering over her in a sexual posture, frightening and repulsive. Later, when she has fled and been hounded by Venables, he appears unbidden to her imagination, protean, and menacing, bestial and satanic:

> I seldom closed my eyes without being haunted by Mr. Venables' image, who seemed to assume terrific or hateful forms to torment me, wherever I turned.--Sometimes a wild cat, a roaring bull, or hideous assassin, whom I vainly attempted to fly; at others he was a demon, hurrying me to the brink of a precipice, plunging me into dark waves, or horrid gulfs . . .. (179)

A jealous second son, Venables marries for money. Only a short while after their marriage, Maria, shocked by his greed, "started back," she says, as if she "'had found a wasp in a rosebush,'" an intruder in her garden; "'the demon of discord entered our paradise'" (143). Going on to assume the role of a devilish tempter, he fails to seduce Maria into prostitution with "Mr. S---" (160), and so has her "buried alive" (185) in a hellish asylum.

Maria is not defeated by the madhouse. Her imaginative powers are given full scope there, and distinguish her as intellectually and emotionally irrepressible and beyond reproach. (This ability to transcend physical and social constraint explains why the episode of her escape from the asylum, though fraught with awful dread and peculiar horrors, is, schematically, almost incidental.) Initially, Maria lacks the faculty to be moved by her extraordinary gothic surroundings because she has been drugged. Yet it is implied in the opening sentences of the novel that the evocation of feeling portrayed in the realistic narrative at

hand will supersede that of more typical, fanciful literary productions:

> Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wandering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recal her scattered thoughts! (75)

As Maria recollects the outrage that has been perpetrated against her, she spontaneously casts her tumultuous emotions into projected images; feeling memories are reified:

> The retreating shadows of former sorrows rushed back in a gloomy train, and seemed to be pictured on the walls of her prison, magnified by the state of mind in which they were viewed . . .. (75)

Again, in the same "dreary cell" (76), during an illicit love-meeting with her fellow-prisoner Darnford, an involuntary, emotional kaleidoscope is given identifiable form:

> A magic lamp now seemed to be suspended in Maria's prison, and fairy landscapes flitted around the gloomy walls, late so blank. Rushing from the depths of despair, on the seraph wing of hope, she found herself happy. (99)

Maria's own circumstances inspire original, imaginative creations; her observation of other sufferers is also an occupation tantamount to a conscious engagement in literary, artistic, or theatrical contemplation. Emotional experience of all sorts is curiously objectified. At first the shrieks and groans of the mad inmates do not "amuse while they affright" (75); Maria is too drugged and distraught to observe and therefore to appreciate the suspenseful variety

of their behavior. In time, though, the eccentricities of the lunatics do "harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind" (75):

> there was frequently something so inconceivably picturesque in the varying gestures of unrestrained passion, so irresistibly comic in their sallies, or so heart-piercingly pathetic in the little airs they would sing, frequently bursting out after an awful silence, as to fascinate the attention, and amuse the fancy, while torturing the soul. (92)

Maria's sympathy is exploitative: the attitudes and antics displayed by her demented neighbours extend, according to her perception, to a full range of aesthetic categories (the "picturesque," the "comic," and the "pathetic"), and so gratify her taste. And, in turn, the novel's three protagonists fashion themselves, in their accounts of their subjection to varieties of social injustice, as picturesque, pathetic, or comic objects. Maria, having resolved to break with her husband, stands exultantly before an open window, melting into the natural beauty outdoors (163). Jemima recalls her dispossession as a young girl: "'Behold me then in the street, utterly destitute! Whither could I creep for shelter?'" (108) Darnford describes his past actions with a degree of irony, especially when he relates the capricious reversal of his political alliances--from English officer travelling "'to subjugate America'" (95) to zealous republican and American settler--and his subsequent disillusionment in the savage American wilderness, where on the sight of footprints "'the head ached as if assailed by the scalping knife'" (97). The narrator is indeed explicit

about the capacity of the imagination to acquire substantial psychic rewards in despite of real suffering:

> 'We see what we wish, and make a world of our own--and, though reality may sometimes open a door to misery, yet the moments of happiness procured by the imagination, may, without a paradox, be reckoned among the solid comforts of life.' (189)

"Reality" and "imagination," however, would seem, most of the time, to be mutually exclusive: the free exercise of Maria's imagination obscures her judgement. She on scanty evidence falls in love with Venables; the "magic touch" of the "guinea" he contributes to her distressed charge, she says, "'invested my hero with more than mortal beauty. My fancy had found a basis to erect its model of perfection'" (135). She is seduced by her own construction of a romantic literary ideal. When she meets Darnford in the asylum, she again invests an unknown man with unwarranted value derived from, this time, literary myth:

> Pygmalion formed an ivory maid, and longed for an informing soul. She, on the contrary, combined all the qualities of a hero's mind, and fate presented a statue in which she might enshrine them. (99)

There is no authentic spirit in Maria's self-created model; it is not, like Galatea, divinely inspired by Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Yet the narrator admits at least a fleeting triumph of Maria's formative imagination after she and Darnford have initiated a sexual union:

> Maria now, imagining that she had found a being of celestial mould--was happy, --nor was she deceived.--He was then plastic in her impassioned hand--and reflected all the sentiments which animated and warmed her. (189)

She takes the heavenly ("celestial") material and fashions

it in her own image; she has a fabulous capacity to reshape those around her: her hopeful pretension is confirmed here, but is soon stymied by the wilfullness of her creation. In the end, Maria is miserable because Darnford is faithless; he fails to respond as an active agent to her passionate will. Yet as his history makes clear, his literary and political enthusiasm need the shaping influence of female purity. Private feminine happiness, a product of a purely sympathetic imagination, is but rarely experienced in a world where perverse male motives are commonly exercised. Although Maria counsels her daughter, "always appear as you are, and you will not pass through existence without enjoying its genuine blessings, love and respect" (124), she relates with bitterness that as a young girl interceding for the poor, "my eloquence was in my complexion . . . the beauty of a young girl was so much more interesting than the distress of an old one" (134). It is to be assumed from such structural and verbal discrepancies that the heroine as a woman of authentic feeling is of and is not of the "real" world; she occupies a no-man's-land.

Darnford, like Maria, is subjected to gothic dislocation; but, because of a fervent and undisciplined imagination, he is also the agent of his own unhappiness. Darnford in America experiences a lack of employment and a consequent susceptibility to feeling which is analogous to the enforced idleness endured by ladies, but he finds revolutionary freedom to be equally futile and damaging.

Having been wounded in the American revolutionary war, Darnford is, he says, "'confined to my bed, or chair, by a lingering cure,'" and "'my only refuge from the preying activity of my mind, was books'" and "'conversation'" (95). In this condition, he is grateful for the attentions of his hosts, and so is "'dazzled by the hospitality of the Americans,'" and enthused by new "'political sentiments'" (95). But he finds that America has the absurd immensity of a Miltonic Hell, and its people have the same calculated pride and irrelevant rebelliousness as hell's inhabitants. Americans overthrow established traditional and religious modes "'before the understanding could be gradually emancipated'" (95). Darnford mockingly criticizes

> 'The resolution, that led them, in pursuit of independence, to embark on rivers like seas, to search for unknown shores, and to sleep under the hovering mists of endless forests, while baleful damps agued their limbs . . ..' (95)

Their determination

> 'was now turned into commercial speculations, till the national character exhibited a phenomenon in the history of the human mind -- a head enthusiastically enterprising, with cold selfishness of heart.' (96)

Darnford complains of America's Brobdingnagian proportions, and regrets his Gulliver-like impulse to travel and explore the country. He is wearied by the "'ample scale'" (96) of the landscape; he passes over "'immense tracks of country'" (96) quite fruitlessly:

> The eye wandered without an object to fix upon over immeasurable plains, and lakes that seemed replenished by the ocean, whilst eternal forests of small clustering trees, obstructed the circulation of the air, and embarrassed the path, without

gratifying the taste. (96-97)

Oppressed by the aesthetics of American topography, Darnford is further disenchanted to discover that America's social freedom is only apparent: "'Inequality of condition'" in the "'large towns'" is "'most disgustingly galling'" (95). Moreover, American city women "'have all the airs and ignorance of the ladies who give the tone to the circles of the large trading towns in England'" (96). Darnford would seem to reveal a cultural snobbishness in his preference for Europe's "'literature,'" "'fine arts,'" and "'polish of manners'" (95), as well as its "'picturesque views'" (96). [illegible] civilized, peopled landscapes (97). However, on his return to England, he is enchanted by London prostitutes ("'they appeared to me,'" he says, "'like angels'" [9[illegible]]) before he is unjustly imprisoned and viciously denied, like Maria and Jemima, his rightful inheritance of money and legal status. Ironically, Darnford freely exercises virtuous happiness when he finds true love with Maria in the confinement of the madhouse. In the case of all three characters, sensible sexual alliances generate change. The consummated yet guiltless romance between Maria and Darnford, which signals Maria's sovereign independence from her husband, is facilitated by Jemima, a former prostitute whose own transformation is initiated by the rational improvement she gains during her time as a literary man's mistress, and is completed through Maria's recognition of her moral equality:

> 'what should induce me to be the champion for suffering humanity?--Who ever risked any thing for me?--Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow-creature?'
>
> Maria took her hand, and Jemima, more overcome by kindness than she had ever been by cruelty, hastened out of the room to conceal her emotions. (119)

Maria's sympathy is visionary, accomplishing what English society does not, and what America cannot: it compensates for, if it does not rectify, the disgusting inequality of condition found in a socially unjust, fallen world.

The Wrongs of Woman is an archive of Wollstonecraft's life, particularly of her life's personal and polemical writings, including the autobiographical fragments of Mary. But if Mary and The Wrongs of Woman represent acts of defiant self-creation and re-creation, they also affirm bourgeois prejudices which exalt ladies as moral and domestic instructors. (It is interesting that Original Stories from Real Life,'' a hortative book concerning the education of girls, published in the same year as Mary, was vastly more popular.[20]) Wollstonecraft is concerned that women's subjection is detrimental to the moral progress of her society: the reform of legal injustices, male biases, and inadequate female education is as necessary to the integrity of the public realm as it is to the happiness of the private feminine one. Her heroines are idealized

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''Mary Wollstonecraft, Original Stories from Real Life, 1788.

[20]Emily W. Sunstein, A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 164. In contrast to her novels, Original Stories from Real Life "was a success; there were four editions over a period of thirty-five years."

feminine models possessing rational sensibilities; they have the potential to uplift society, yet, since men are their essential reference points, and since neither the temperaments nor the mortality of men is governable, the frustrated female protagonists are hopelessly alienated and unhappy, and society remains unredeemed. That is to say, the contradictions within liberal ideology between ideas of the social construction of the individual and the biological determinism of gender are not resolved in Wollstonecraft's writing. The importance of social relations in the formation of feminine character is acknowledged but underplayed, while the role of innate sexual distinctiveness is emphasized. Wollstonecraft's feminine radicalism, emerging as it does from bourgeois patriarchal discourse, can only be described as a double-edged sword, a weapon used for, and yet directed against, the enhancement of women's lives.

## VI. Moral Discrimination and Social Hierarchy in *Pride and Prejudice*

Mary Poovey, in her discussion of the historical relation between feminine literature and the character of class and gender distinctions in Jane Austen's lifetime, suggests that Austen's novels contribute to a literary compensation for the constrained situation of women:

> In Jane Austen's society, of course, romantic love did not alter the institutions of marriage or property or female dependence. And even the private gratification available in the domestic sphere could not live up to the intensity and power promised by romantic love, for as a wife and mother, a woman could at best act indirectly, through her children, through sacrifice, through duty. Romantic love, finally, had its most vital, most satisfying existence not in society but in art.[1]

Poovey observes that Austen posits "the existence of private spheres within her fiction," and that

> the "private" sphere is theoretically linked to the "public" sphere by the influence bred of contiguity. But these private spheres are actually qualitatively different from the public spheres.[2]

That is to say, the supposedly "concentric arrangement of 'spheres'" which would allow for the operation of feminine influence in the larger society "is, of course, actually a hierarchy of power"[3] which denies feminine authority. According to this critical paradigm of the ideology of Austen's class,[4] then, the impetus to elaborate in fiction

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[1]Mary Poovey, "Persuasion and the Promises of Love," in *The Representation of Women in Fiction: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1981*. New Series, no. 7, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983): 174.

[2]Poovey, 174-75.

[3]Poovey, 173.

[4]see Poovey, 155, and Donald J. Greene, "Jane Austen and the

upon the value of women's place is motivated by a broadly political compulsion:

> women had a particular investment in conceptualizing their space as special and as containing moral authority.[5]

In Austen's fiction, says Poovey, "personal feeling can be a moral force in society"[6]; this supposition is one that masks what Terry Lovell in "Jane Austen and the Gentry: A study in Literature and Ideology"[7] describes as the imputation of "structural causes" of class and gender crises to "moral crises."[8] Lovell contends indeed that it is the crucial role

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(cont'd) Peerage," PMLA 68 (1953): 1031. Poovey places Jane Austen "as the daughter of a country clergyman with numerous and strong ties to both the landed upper gentry and the entrepreneurial component of the middle classes." (Greene suggests that Austen "found it possible to be enthusiastic both for the notion of noblesse oblige and for the notion of la carrière ouverte aux talents.") Further, as "an unmarried woman and a writer," Austen is dependent upon "the protection and stability of patriarchal society," while she enjoys making money from, as well as earning praise for, her novels, she "recognized the imperatives of personal feelings and the rewards of individual effort." Her fiction, therefore, manifests the tension between "individualism and paternalistic values."

[5] Poovey, 177.

[6] Poovey, 177.

[7] Terry Lovell, "Jane Austen and the Gentry: A study in Literature and Ideology," in The Sociology of Literature: Applied Studies, ed. Diana Laurenson (Hanley, England: Wood Mitchell & Co., 1978): 33.

[8] Judith Lowder Newton, "Pride and Prejudice: Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen," Feminist Studies 4 (1978): 38. Judith Lowder Newton's more polemically phrased view of Austen's contextual resolution concurs with the feminist, if not the class, analysis of Poovey and Lovell:

> It is a less anxiety-provoking business for a woman to assert power against an aspect of herself, against the enemy within, than against the traditional power relations of her culture. And though it is necessary and vital to assert oneself against one's blindness, in a patriarchal society, it also is a much surer and more lasting form of power than pitting oneself against the traditional

of Austen's heroines that they bring to their marriages

> the moral and intellectual strengths to the lack of which she had attributed the main threat to gentry society. The heroines guarantee the renewal of gentry society by marriages into it.'

Socialist-feminist analyses situate the "feminine conservatism"[10] of Austen's sensibility to suggest that as late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century English culture adjusts itself to profound shifts in the economic and social structure, Austen's novels, in relegating the "lady" to the defense or advancement of English domestic virtue, participate in a mystification of the struggle between the landed upper gentry which seeks to maintain itself and the entrepreneurial class which desires to advance itself, and of the movement of both classes to efficiently maintain male hegemony. Bluntly put--the fantasy in Austen of the amelioration of serious social deficiencies through the refinement of feminine moral discrimination displaces the more facile fantasies of the conventional romances which her fiction parodies.

Austen's sophisticated, multiple perspectives on class, gender privilege and literary convention in Pride and Prejudice,[11] the novel containing her favourite heroine,[12]

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[8](cont'd) privileges of men.
[9]Lovell, 32.
[10]Lovell, 34.
[11]Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, ed. Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). All further references will be to this text.
[12]Austen writes of her character Elizabeth Bennet in a letter: "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know." See R. W. Chapman, ed., Jane Austen's Letters to her

reveals the workings of a discourse which portrays but recontains the affective threat posed by economic and social structures and by defective romantic fictional form. Her fiction resolves the systemic constraints it depicts through the realization of feminine propriety and the fulfillment of romantic love. Austen brings the heroine to a happy consummation of the public good and private gratification;[13] the text emphasizes on the one hand the obstacles to social harmony and personal happiness through the complexly rendered depiction of "the nuances of social relationships"[14] and, on the other, validates romance, which Austen's self-conscious parody and revision of novelistic conventions invests with distinction, integrity, and seriousness, and with charm and wit. Austen shifting the economic and social issues associated with class and gender--the questions, for instance, of inheritance, patronage, and occupation--to the moral plane, and deflating the adventure and mannerisms of romance to accommodate a moral comedy of manners, avoids stereotyping class and gender, though the novel includes vacuous representatives of the vulgarity of trade, a pompous aristocracy, a feckless gentry. But the characters in Pride and Prejudice are not necessarily reducible to fixed class or gender types. Rather

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[12](cont'd) sister Cassandra and others, second edition (London: Oxford UP, 1952) 297.

[13]see Lovell, 27. In a schematic diagram of the "Maximum possible good which may be achieved" by Austen's characters, Lovell categorizes the heroines and heroes of her novels as the most successful, because they assume "Social and moral leadership at apex of local society."

[14]Lovell, 33.

the reasonable ladies and gentlemen of various classes in the novel stand felicitously together on the grounds of moral sympathy--and, in the end, congregate on the grounds of the hero's model estate, Pemberley. Social and economic differences impede the stability of the community no more than do temperamental dissimilarities, and the importance of these is further diminished by the realization of romantic love and the occasion of civilized, extended kinship through marriage. The mild suspense (in contradistinction to the baroque kind typical of gothic romance) which Austen creates concerning the possible misery or injustice arising from either the biases of male inheritance, such as that which could leave the five Bennet sisters homeless and impoverished, or of broad discretionary powers, such as that wielded by Fitzwilliam Darcy, the wealthy landed inheritor, over his late father's protégé Wickam, is resolved by the heroine Elizabeth Bennet's and Darcy's eventual understanding and mutuality, so that the grave implications of the grounds, as opposed to the conditions, of the heroine's trepidation or outrage, are obscured.

The novel connects the moral and rhetorical planes; verbal self-consciousness is linked to the striving for a full emotional acceptance of imperfection within the character's self and within others. It is indeed the object of the narrative that pride and prejudice be replaced by humility and tolerance through the ethical drama of interpretive and expressive refinement. In valorizing

rhetorical style and its ready deployment as an index to the moral quality of ladies and gentlemen, Pride and Prejudice discovers that the ability to use language well is the means to connection and consensus between the diverse levels of the genteel classes. The ability of characters, and of readers, to learn to remark distinctions in verbal acuity--Darcy begins by obtusely misunderstanding the criticism couched in Elizabeth's archness; Elizabeth initially errs in capriciously favouring Wickam's slanders despite the evidence of Darcy's habit of sober if ponderous ethical deliberation--overrides the propensity to focus on the meaning and intent of social distinctions. The humour and moral disposition of the individual are of determining importance in the ultimately benign situations of the characters. The heroine is richly but not gratuitously rewarded by her most fortunate marriage to Darcy; she transcends the threat of continued domestic uneasiness and public humiliation by her family when she amends her perceptual failing. The narrator, then, is the centre of a benevolent linguistic universe; her heroine is the closest of her comic satellites. Rhetorical aplomb allows the heroine to lead a brilliant feminine existence, one only possible, perhaps, in fictional language, where a chastened expressive intentionality, as well as lively wit and sprightly charm, can be foregrounded and celebrated as adorable virtues.

The famous opening salvo of Pride and Prejudice, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (51), satirizes the crude material speculation and complacency about sexuality which grounds the thinking of much of the heroine's society. Austen manoeuvres around the vexatious question of the valuation of women and the genteel classes according to their fortunes, situations, and prospects--a public estimation implicitly acknowledged as necessary, not to mention inevitable--by focusing on the moral operation of the individual within the social framework as the process of the various settlements, including that of the heroine, unfolds. The generalized anxiety within the novel that the young be felicitously established and bettered through marriage, the purchase or inheritance of landed property, or advancement in a profession or occupation, is countered by a less universal concern that the young be happily as well as satisfactorily mated or installed. However, such a consideration assumes, within the terms of reference of Pride and Prejudice, the status of a universal proposition which is neither unwise nor logical--Austen resists the pragmatism of her less admirable characters--but which involves an appraisal of the sensibility of minds and manners. Austen considers neither social status nor moral temperament apart from the other; furthermore, although the duties and pleasures associated with particularized social places vary in scope and detail,

the affective effort of individual exertion to ensure the happiness of others is a basic virtue incumbent on all the characters. Future well-being is not absolutely determined by prejudicial legal customs and the other accidental distinctions of birth; social or economic difficulties arise from the failure of individual characters to adapt themselves, for the good of others, to unavoidable exigencies. And despite the structural regimen which governs the disposition of private property and the standards of decorum, the characters have considerable latitude in their public performances and private choices: the heroine's eminently gratifying coupling with Darcy, a man of superior status and of a temper antithetical to hers, is the clearest example of Austen's conception of the fluid nature of class and gender relationships. Indeed the four marriages which occur within the timeframe of the novel culminate in actual kinship, for better or for worse, between each family, and therefore between each class, depicted in Pride and Prejudice.

A proper balance between prosperous respectability and adept sociability occurs within only three of the nine marriages depicted in the novel: marital harmony is fortuitously accomplished between the heroine's eldest sister Jane and her equally sanguine and passive lover Charles Bingley; on the other hand, the happiness of Elizabeth and Darcy, both introspective yet dynamic, is exceptional but hard-won; and the long-standing and proven

marriage of Elizabeth's maternal uncle and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, marked as it is by solicitude and by their mutual willingness to initiate and undertake action on behalf of their immediate and extended family, assures the reader and, presumably, the attentive heroine, that domestic "joy and kindness" (188) is a plausible hope. In addition to engaging with their wives in family concerns, admirable husbands devote themselves to more extensive work. Darcy, the prestigious owner of a venerable family estate, has many dependents: so, it can be assumed, does the industrious man of business, Mr. Gardiner; and Bingley, who after his marriage at last settles on his own estate, must necessarily turn to the requisite responsibilities of the serious gentleman. The "business" of life in Pride and Prejudice includes, moreover, genteel leisure; indeed, the action of the novel occurs almost exclusively at the scene of the assemblies, balls, visits, dinners, walks, and card-parties, all of which contribute to romance, and therefore to the significant joining of couples; and, as the novel ends, when matters are finally proceeding ideally for the worthy characters, gatherings serve to generally advance regulated sociability and cohesiveness. The purpose and mode of duty and entertainment alike seem to devolve contextually to the precepts of Christian communion and an obliquely Christian self-valuation, to the ideals of service and humility. An examination of the number of comic but startling allusions to death in the Bennet family, which centre in Mr. Bennet's

reluctance to govern his affairs, and of the diverting irony associated with the proceedings of the novel's two clergymen, the heroine's well-placed but foolish distant cousin, Mr. Collins, and her profligate future brother-in-law Mr. Wickham, who has sold his right to a "'valuable'" (230) parish living for a mess of pottage ("'three thousand pounds'" [230]), points to Austen's concern with the malignancy of a derelict Christian hierarchy: of family head, public steward, and priest. While women are often potential victims of this confusion of the social and moral hierarchy, they participate in both the culpability and regeneration of community by acting out moral faults and virtues. Indeed, Austen's sardonically incorporated allusions to death satirize the preoccupation of the weak-minded of both sexes with interest in property and feminine marital status and expose the nastiness of skewed moral judgements: the disregard for the feelings of others inherent in callous reckonings of health, wealth, and ascendency reflects a dangerous ignorance of the meaning of life. But the threat to the integrity of religious consciousness and social hierarchy posed by corrupt values and valuation is overturned in Pride and Prejudice by the dramatic comedy which enacts the "universal" truth of the vanity of human wishes: the relevance of ownership and distinction is conceded but highly qualified, since the characters, men or women, richer or poorer, are subject to surprising disappointments and opportunities and to the

levelling of mortal transience. The traditions of privilege and place, viewed ideologically as moral as well as sociological categories, are upheld as prudent and just models through the romantic modification of pride and prejudice; the heroine, who of all the characters evinces the most intelligent respect for the convictions and decorum to be ideally exhibited by ladies and gentlemen, and on whose qualitative change in perception the novel is centered, is the one to make the greatest quantitative leap in fortune.

As Mrs. Bennet pointlessly bewails the fact of the entailment of her husband's estate, Longbourn, to Mr. Collins, expressing irritation that the heir's new wife, their neighbor's daughter Charlotte Lucas, will one day replace her as "mistress of this house," Mr. Bennet gibes her: "'Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor'" (170). Ironically, however, his droll consolation suggests the only solution to his wife's inexorable fate as his widow; Mr. Bennet has failed to provide, not only an heir, but even, through "economy," "an annual sum, for the better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him" (322). "Mrs. Bennet had no turn" (322) for frugality; he yields to her thriftless habits. His own habit of passivity in domestic government lends itself to the operation of an ominously deficient moral economy within his family. Mrs. Bennet, in a bid to advance the courtship of her eldest daughter Jane with her wealthy suitor Bingley,

forces the young woman on the attentions of the young man and his sisters by sending her to them, on horseback, knowing it will rain; part of the unexpected, dubious "felicity" of the mother's "contrivance" (78) is Jane's subsequent cold: Mrs. Bennet is happy for Jane's incapacitation, as it extends her stay at Bingley's house at Netherfield. Mr. Bennet is bitterly aware of his wife's cheapening of their daughter's person and life:

> 'if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.' (78)

He apparently disdains the mother's willingness to sacrifice her daughter's health as a sort of bodily payment toward a profitable marriage; but he has issued no counter-orders to his wife's, and only indicates his superior sense with a sarcasm impenetrable to her dull wit: typically he does not interrupt her distasteful schemes. After their youngest daughter, Lydia, has actually unlawfully conceded her person to the officer Mr. Wickham, Mrs. Bennet's obsessive, unreasonably articulated fear for her own displacement should her husband die is fantastically reiterated to her brother Mr. Gardiner:

> 'I know he will fight Wickham, wherever he meets him, and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Collinses will turn us out, before he is cold in his grave; and if you are not kind to us, brother, I do not know what we shall do.' (304)

The Bennet family must expect to be indebted to Mr. Gardiner, a man with four young children of his own, before

such a time; Mr. Bennet's neglect of future contingencies means he cannot extricate his family and his name from the disgrace of Lydia's sexual fall, for Wickham needs--demands--money for a wife. Mrs. Bennet's "terrific" (304) idea that her husband will die in a duel with the seducer is followed by the expression of a desperate concern about Lydia's new wardrobe ("'And tell my dear Lydia, not to give any directions about her clothes, till she has seen me, for she does not know which are the best warehouses'" [304]). The romance and vanity of her preoccupations at the moment of family scandal epitomize her practice of "ill-judging indulgence" (303) which accounts for Lydia's prodigal indiscretion, and her predilection for the free spending which is at the root of the strained finances threatening Lydia's social reinstatement.

While Mrs. Bennet is unthinking and therefore unrepentant about her conduct, her husband at least recognizes the shame of his nominal independence as a landed gentleman in the paucity of his legacy to his children: "'no man in his senses,'" he says, "'would marry Lydia on so slight a temptation as one hundred a-year during my life, and fifty after I am gone'" (318). Though his low opinion of Lydia's intrinsic value may be, in the circumstance, accurate, he does not express regret at his failure to better shape her character, or, at least, to curb her wildness; and, despite his affection for Elizabeth ("'Lizzy'"), his disrespect for his daughters is consistent

throughout: "'they are all silly and ignorant like other girls'" (52). However, in specifying the precise financial details of Lydia's fortunes, he concedes his own uselessness: the young woman is worth little while he is living, and less after death, not because of the rights and restrictions of property, but because of her father's lassitude. Lydia is a worthless commodity who needs an outside investor (who Mr. Bennet thinks is his brother-in-law; but Darcy, it transpires--his other future son-in-law--has insisted on assuming the considerable cost of marrying Lydia "'to one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain'" [322]) to rescue her from "ruin"; it is his money, not the ludicrous gallantry Mrs. Bennet fears he will display, Lydia needs to save her honour. Mr. Bennet is indeed not chivalrous; Elizabeth does, however, contemplate turning to her father to protect her when Mr. Collins attributes her refusal to marry him to coyness: in the event of Mr. Collins' persistence, she hopes that her father's "negative might be uttered in such a manner as might be decisive," and that his "behavior at least could not be mistaken for the affectation and coquetry of an elegant female" (150). But Mr. Bennet is a type of a coquet: he delights in teasing his wife and daughters with his mysteries and surprises, and retreats distantly (into his library) when he has done with them. Mr. Collins of course is not so rudely playful, though he exhibits, in his pompous courtliness, as much incivility to women. He includes with

breathtaking tactlessness in his astonishing marriage proposal to Elizabeth, an anticipation of the deaths of both her parents, reminding her that he is "'to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father,'" who, he concedes, however regretfully, "'(may live many years longer).'"; and he forgives the heroine for the paucity of her personal fortune, which amounts to "'one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents. which will not be yours till after your mother's decease...'" (148). Mr. Collins, in reducing Elizabeth to the exact sum of her inconsiderable parts, proposes to patronize her, to invest her with the dignity of his reflected worth. While Mrs. Bennet would make her daughters meretricious, Mr. Bennet and Mr. Collins dehumanize them by perceiving them unsociably, and so, unheroically: they do not serve women. Elizabeth is finally treated by Darcy as she is not by her father and her unworthy suitor; not with agreeable, or disagreeable, condescension, but with sympathetic deference and active concern. In Pride and Prejudice it is perspective, not subordinate economic and social place, which demeans young, unsettled women with poor fortunes.

As a case in point, Mr. Collins, refused by Elizabeth, turns to the next available thing, Charlotte Lucas, who views the integrity of her feelings as irrelevant to the material practicalities of a marital transaction. Charlotte is older and plainer than Elizabeth, though just as unprovided for, and, sharing Mr. Collins' view of the

maidenly position of one such as her as opposed to her prospects as his wife, accepts Mr. Collins from "the pure and disinterested desire for an establishment" (163). Her parents rejoice accordingly. Sir William the knighted tradesman, and Lady Lucas, who are the Bennets' closest neighbors, look forward, like Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, to Mr. Bennet's death: "Lady Lucas began directly to calculate, with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mr. Bennet was likely to live"; while her husband relishes the notion of "whenever Mr. Collins should be in possession of the Longbourn estate" as the time for his daughter and her husband to "make their appearance at St. James's" (163). But Mr. Collins, like Mrs. Bennet, might be given pause to consider that he might die before Mr. Bennet; neither do the Lucases consider that their daughter might pre-decease her husband (Darcy's mother did so)--Charlotte might not survive, for instance, child-birth: and Mr. Collins is in "'expectation of a young olive branch'" (372) by the time of Elizabeth's betrothal to Darcy. And, in any case, failure to produce a son would mean the settlement of Longbourn on yet another family, so that Mrs. Collins might eventually find herself anticipating the same dispossession in widowhood Mrs. Bennet dreads. From this less than hopeful set of plausible future possibilities may be extrapolated the generalization that property and possessions are as accidental and transient as life itself. This principle is cogently and triumphantly expressed in Mr.

Bennet's wry letter to Mr. Collins, informing his officious, intrusive relative of Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy, an event offensive to the clergyman's patron, who is Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh:

> 'Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give.' (390)

Not only will the Bennets not live to regret Elizabeth's refusal to be the wife of the heir to the modest estate of Longbourn; not only does the marriage prove that the Bennets are not stigmatized by the ignominy of Lydia's sexual lapse; not only will Elizabeth be kin to her cousin's patron, and upset Lady Catherine's dynastic intentions to marry her own daughter to Darcy: Mr. Collins may even find himself courting Elizabeth as the wife of a new and richer if somewhat less distinguished patron. Underlying the contextual joke on Mr. Collins, who has himself been exalted beyond his initial expectations (he is somewhat unbalanced by "early and unexpected prosperity" [114]), is the universal truth that no one's comfort or social standing is immutable--whether because of sexual love, mismanagement of talents, inheritance, and family obligations, or the intervention of death. This narrative conceptualization deflects from the ubiquitous compromising of women in the novel by the forces of male privilege.

Mr. Collins' letter to Mr. Bennet on the occasion of Lydia's elopement blandly phrases a sentiment which is worthy, like Mrs. Bennet's outrageous prediction of paternal

death in a duel, of literary romance: "'The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this'" (312). The drastic but ostensibly preferable alternative--death--to a woman's illicit coupling is a sentiment which exposes Mr. Collins' absence of feeling for the meaning of social disgrace and of the theology he is trained to profess. Just as a dishonoured daughter need not be avenged by a duel and the possible death of the avenger, neither does the sin of the fallen woman render her unredeemable in society or in spirit: Lydia's predicament can be resolved with a payment of money to Wickham; atonement of sin through death has been undertaken by the Christian savior. Darcy, arranging a legitimate marriage for Lydia in secret, selflessly saves the feelings and reputation of Elizabeth, the woman he loves, and therefore is the hero of Christian principle.

Mr. Collins has no sensible understanding of his social place or of his professional vocation. He suggests in his introductory letter to Mr. Bennet that "'As a clergyman...I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing of all the families within the reach of my influence...'" (107). In fact, the occasion of the letter and his visit is prompted by his patron's pronoucement that he should marry, and the first and only young women he thinks of are those least likely to be predisposed toward him--the ones he is meant to displace from Longbourn. Mr. Collins is moved to insinuate himself into the Bennet household also as a means of

"amends--of atonement" (114) for the inheritance he will gain by virtue of the entailment of Longbourn: he intends to marry one of the future dispossessed orphans. Although Mr. Bennet quips that "'nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn'" (107), the possession of Longbourn, being neither earned nor extorted, in itself should inspire neither pride nor shame: an inheritance is, as it were, a free gift to be accepted morally rather than equivocally, like a religious imperative, responsibly and with gratitude.

Ironically, Lydia, the young flirt ("always unguarded and often uncivil" [167]), whom Mr. Collins imagines better dead, and servile and self-important (108) Mr. Collins, whom Lydia does not think about at all, have in common a passionless, indiscriminate view of sexual partnership which renders their conceits romantic yet grotesque and their marriages respectable yet profane. Lydia's keenness for the glamour of the militia officers posted in the village of Meryton is synechdotal with their costume--she, like her sister Kitty, cares only for men wearing "a scarlet coat" and no "other colour" will do (109)--and is distracted only by feminine dress:

> Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart bonnet indeed, or a really new muslin in a shop window, could recal them. (113)

Lydia later having wantonly wasted money on an avowedly "ugly" "bonnet" (246), goes on to relate an episode of the riotous cross-dressing of an officer: "'We dressed up

Chamberlayne in women's clothes, on purpose to pass for a lady...'" (248). In switching a scarlet coat for a gown ("'you cannot imagine how well he looked'"), the casual vanity of sartorial and sexual diversions is inanely merged. Lydia acknowledges only the most arbitrary distinctions, whether aesthetic or sexual, and then only to further self-aggrandizing amusements: she is morally callous as well as expressively indelicate. "'Lord, how I laughed...I thought I should have died'" (248), she recalls about this last performance in deceit. It is not surprising then that when Lydia informs her "companion" (257) in Brighton, "Mrs. Forster, the wife of the Colonel of the regiment" (256) to which Wickham belongs, in a flippant "note" (307), of her elopement, she makes only one pointed request, and that pertains, not to her ruinous passion--for she includes a coquettish message to "'Pratt,'" with whom she will not be dancing that night--but to her clothing:

> 'I wish you would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my working muslin gown....' (307)

Lydia blithely leaves it up to others to mend her carelessly rent honour and her spoiled gown.

Lydia's banal imagination projects a plethora of uniformed suitors; she anticipates that at the Brighton encampment she will be surrounded by a harem of military admirers:

> She saw herself the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. (259)

Her hackneyed feminine fantasies have an ironic counterpart

in Mr. Collins' fanciful marshalling of marital candidates. Being told by Mrs. Bennet that Jane, his initial choice for a wife after the acquaintance of "the first evening" (114), because she is the eldest and the prettiest, is taken, he

> had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth--and it was soon done--done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire. (115)

Stirred to courtly action not by a desirable woman, but first by the dictates of his matronly patron, and fired again by the eager match-making of a "complaisant" (115) mother, Mr. Collins is as devoid of sensible passion, and as nescient about the sanctified desire of marriage--as opposed to the social obligation to marry--as "'thoughtless, thoughtless Lydia'" (307).

The heroine is bemused by Mr. Collins' confusion of his pastoral duties with his sycophantic devotion to his patron:

> Elizabeth was chiefly struck with his extraordinary deference for Lady Catherine, and his kind intention of christening, marrying, and burying his parishioners whenever it were required. (108)

The grand liturgical rhythm of Mr. Collins' introductory letter enacts his worshipful pose before Lady Catherine de Bourgh:

> 'having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish....' (107)

Mr. Collins imitates Lady Catherine, and not his saviour: he perceives himself as condescending to perform the duties of his station. He also expects, in turn, feminine compliance

with the illegitimate authority of his fatuous, derivative instruction (he will not be placated when Lydia interrupts the "monotonous solemnity" of his reading of "Fordyce's Sermons" [113]), spurious gratitude from a wife (he is emphatic that Elizabeth should marry him on the merits of his "'situation'" and "'connections'" [150], and indeed Charlotte Lucas accepts him on that basis [165-6]), and, if nothing else, envied awe (although Elizabeth, being treated to a particular tour of Hunsford Parsonage after his marriage to Charlotte, "was not able to gratify him by any sigh of repentance" [192]). The clergyman's model, Lady Catherine, opinionated and intrusive, affects omniscience in her private conversations and public duties: she presumes in her drawing-room to determine what "weather" is to occur "on the morrow" (201), and tries to bully any parishioners who are "quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor" into "harmony and plenty" (193). On the other hand, she provides her retainer, Mr. Collins, with a bountiful living, improvements to the parsonage, and condescending attentiveness reflected in her free advice: in waiting upon Lady Catherine so assiduously, Mr. Collins serves God and Mammon, not to mention the courtly tradition, at the same time.

Mr. Collins' literary taste runs from moralistic prescription ("Fordyce's Sermons")--he categorically refuses to please the ladies by reading aloud from a novel--to the pretence of choosing from among "the largest folios" in Mr. Bennet's library, and he sits "reading and writing" (202)

unconcentratedly in his own library at Hunsford. However, he admits to rehearsing "'little elegant compliments'" (112) to impress his patron. He is indifferent to the literature and composition associated with his class and profession, being instead engaged by the splendour of Lady Catherine's house Rosings, and engrossed by the dimensions of rooms and number of shelves in his Parsonage House. Mr. Collins' comic oddities, his failure to comply with innocent feminine pleasures, his pastoral apathy, and his house-pride are collapsed into two lines of dialogue between Elizabeth and Wickham, in a conversation occurring after Wickham has made his travesty of a marriage with Lydia, and long after Elizabeth's understanding of his refusal to take orders: the verbal exchange connects the essential unmanliness of Mr. Collins and Wickham: neither is fit to be a husband or a rector. Mr. Wickham's leading comments on his lost--actually forfeited--living, which would have made his married life convenient, echo Mr. Collins' venal concerns:

> 'Excellent Parsonage House! It would have suited me in every respect.'

Elizabeth, responding to his impudence by asking "'how should you have liked making sermons'" (340), recalls Wickham's invention and publication of malicious gossip about Darcy, and the profession of preaching the Gospel which he rejected in favour of profligacy. The obliviousness of men to the moral decorum of romance signals in Pride and Prejudice a menace to religious principle. Wickham, like Mr. Collins, has the stuff neither of the dashing hero of

romance nor of the literate Christian pastor. The moral stance of men, as well as of women themselves, determines emotional happiness for women. The economic and institutional primacy of men is of itself irrelevant to the marriages of the female characters. Interposed between feminine fulfillment in love and the operation of Christian love are the values and conventions of social structures which are perceived as neutral. Matters of power and property are thus subsumed within Austen's constructed dialectic between the heroine's romantic history and the issues of ontology; between feminine individuality and philosophical integrity.

Descended from nobility on his mother's side, and of an exemplary and wealthy father, Darcy, generous to his tenants, kind to his servants, loyal to his friends, and gallant at least to those women beloved by him, is deservedly at the apex of the social world depicted in the novel. Elizabeth's epiphanic realization of Darcy's worth in society ("to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" [267]) and to his family ("'He is certainly a good brother,' said Elizabeth" [271]) is part panegyric, part moral insight:

> As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! How much of good or evil must be done by him! (272)

The heroine's acknowledgement that Darcy's given place and his personal merit are congruent signals her assimilation of

a comprehensive social view: she appreciates his character within context. Elizabeth is now fit to be Darcy's wife: her moral education is complete when she reasons her feelings of esteem for the man and respect for his place. He in turn goes on to multiply her reasons to be grateful for his love. Darcy's generous gallantry--his affection and his resources--overcomes the sources of Elizabeth's humiliation: her class origins, the incorrigibility of most of her family, and the particular distress of her perceptual indiscretions. He pays out money to his enemy Wickham to prevent the ignominy of Lydia's ruin, graciously befriends the presentable members of her family--Jane and the Gardiners--and excuses Elizabeth's unfounded grievances against him. Their union testifies to the power of a feminine "'liveliness'" of "'mind'" (388) ("'You may as well call it impertinence at once,'" suggests Elizabeth to Darcy), and of verbal playfulness; for besides her sincerely "'affectionate behavior'" (388) to Jane, which would suggest to Darcy her suitability as a companionable sister-in-law to Georgiana, Elizabeth has little else to recommend her to a man such as Darcy. While women are debarred from rights to property or independent livelihood, their relegation to the private "sphere," including as it does the possibility of feminine moral adventure in romance, and the career of moral fulfillment in marriage, is upheld in Pride and Prejudice as a desirable necessity.

Darcy's distinctiveness lies in character as well as in fortune. The other male characters in the novel, all lower on the social scale, whether financially or in rank, have less material power and--with the exception of Mr. Gardiner, who has neither rank, significant inheritance, nor gentleman's profession--less material sense than Darcy. His pride of place, his self-importance, are tempered by his acting on the realization of his mortality: he improves his library, for instance, because he understands himself to have inherited it for his heirs. The "'good'" library at Pemberley "'has been the work of many generations,'" and he has "'added'" (83) to it. And Darcy's scrupulous attention to the affairs of his estate is exemplified by his arrival at Pemberley, a day earlier than expected, to consult with his steward. Mr. Bingley, on the other hand, perpetuates his own father's lack of purpose and foresight:

> Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it.--Mr. Bingley intended it likewise...but...it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase. (63)

The tardy transition from trade (Bingley's grandfather) to landed gentry is a regrettable waste of opportunity: Bingley's father neglected his library, leaving only "'a small collection of books'" (83). Mr. Bennet, like Bingley, forgoes mastery; neither of his chief occupations is of any lasting consequence to anyone but himself. He takes pleasure

in his library as a private sanctuary--his foolish younger daughters in particular are haphazardly educated--and has not instilled in his wife a due respect for his management of the farm: the horses are often seconded for feminine schemes, and, Mr. Bennet says, "'are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them'" (77). Mr. Collins, too, abuses his trusts for the sake of present convenience. He fusses about his professional preferment and superficial domestic alterations to the detriment of present, pressing duty. Sir William Lucas ludicrously assumes the pretence of aristocratic civility without the substance of property: "quitting" both his "business" and his "residence in a small market town,"

> he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. (65)

Sir William's pointless imitation of superficial courtliness is parodied in his youngster's admiration for the debauched adventures of great gentlemen: "'If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy,'" the boy says, "'I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day'" (67). In fact, Wickham would be likely to share these jealous ambitions. The Gardiners, on the other hand, have no landed estate, but live in a house in "Gracechurch-street" in London; they mind their business diligently and well, and are pleased to accept frequent invitations to "'P'" (337), visits eagerly anticipated by Mrs. Gardiner, a city-bound mother of four

young children who has lived appreciatively, in her youth, amidst the beauties of Pemberley's Derbyshire. She could use the benefit of exercise in Pemberley's park (she "was not a great walker" [274]) and the enjoyment of "some of the finest woods in the country" (266). That Darcy comes to exert himself to hospitably share his bounty with such a deserving married lady from the London trade district bespeaks him as the quintessential gentleman in a society which can perform civilizing connections between individuals of diverse origins and characters.

Darcy shares the guardianship of his sister Georgiana with his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, "'the younger son of an Earl'" (217) who is dissatisfied with his financial standing. He admits to a skeptical Elizabeth, herself due very little fortune, and who denies that he can be bereft of resources (she is, however, convinced by Wickham's initial complaint that he has not received sufficient inheritance), that he is constrained to marry for money (216). Georgiana, though a cousin, is also a young charge, and presumably could not figure as a choice; Wickham, however, also a family friend, though a dependent, does stoop to exploit, by means of his familiar charm, the girl's youthful innocence to get her money and his revenge on Darcy. Darcy's own manners may have contributed to this threat to the family's dignity: he "inspired," in Georgiana, "a respect which almost overcame her affection..." (395). Darcy amends neither his imposing demeanour nor his presumptuousness

about women until he is moved by Elizabeth's accusation, after his proposal to her, that he does not behave "'in a gentleman-like manner'" (224). Having reformed his manners (Mr. Gardiner's masculine first impression is that Mr. Darcy is "'perfectly well-behaved, polite, and unassuming'" [278]), he can act, from his capacity as master and public man, as an estimable husband, brother, and host.

Darcy's shared responsibility for Georgiana means that he has considerable but not absolute authority over her; the disposition of his estate and its responsibilities, including the authority over dependents such as Wickham, is certainly not shared by his younger sister or any male relative. Yet his power, though unquestionable, is self-curtailed, is checked, by his sociability. The novel suggests a crucial link in attitude toward fixed yet entrusted material property and disposable yet precious feminine chattel in Darcy's paradigmatic tenure as custodian of Pemberley and guardian of Georgiana. The reality of the contemporary legal extension of property to include ladies, who may or may not be settled with patrilineal estates--Mr. Bennet's daughters are not, while Sir Lewis de Bourgh's daughter, in default of a male child, is--is softened in Pride and Prejudice by the investment of property with iconographic significance, so that property and family, past and future generations, may be morally integrated. Elizabeth and her aunt Mrs. Gardiner regard the well-kept but unspoiled grounds and woods of Pemberley as the chief beauty

of the place; the house is imbued with Darcy's filial reverence and brotherly indulgence. While the late Sir Lewis de Bourgh is remembered for his financial outlay on "glazing" (196), Darcy keeps his father's "favourite room" (269) intact, even to the miniature of the disgraced, detested Wickham.''[5]Darcy had also renovated rooms and installed new acquisitions to please Georgiana. Elizabeth thus evaluates Darcy's property according to the evidence of the honour due to its public prospect and its reflection of his loyalty to his domestic circle.

When Elizabeth enters the "picture gallery" at Pemberley, she is ignorant and uncurious about its artistic treasures: "there were many good paintings, but Elizabeth knew nothing of the art..." (271). She turns "to look instead at some drawings of Miss Darcy's, in crayons, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible." The young lady's work is accessible to the heroine, no doubt because conventional, and, therefore, typical of feminine "accomplishments," the nature of which has been debated much earlier in Bingley's Netherfield drawing room, where he gently derides the paradox of the seeming universality of exceptional female talent:

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''[5]No particular memory of Darcy's mother is noted. However, Lady Catherine recalls that her sister, Darcy's mother, collaborated with her to appoint the marriage of Darcy to his cousin Anne ("'while in their cradles, we planned the union'" [364]). Darcy remembers that his father supported Wickham "'at school and afterwards at Cambridge,'" since the elder Wickham, though an excellent and valued steward, was "'always poor, from the extravagance of his wife'" (230). Darcy, like Elizabeth, may have witnessed varieties of conjugal infelicity and domestic discomfort.

> 'It is amazing to me...how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished, as they all are...They all paint tables, cover skreens and net purses. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.' (84)

Darcy professes himself more discriminating in his evaluation of educated women; Miss Bingley, his "faithful assistant" (she is indeed Mr. Collins-like), interrupts to elaborate:

> 'A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages...and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.' (85)

Darcy adds to this the qualification of "'extensive reading'"; Elizabeth has just protested that she is "'not a great reader,'" and that she has "'pleasure in many things'" (83). Elizabeth's retort to Darcy that she is surprised that "'any'" such women of those accomplishments he endorses exist, amounts to a defense of herself and of her sex. Her skeptical response to Darcy's lofty requirements of women signals Austen's thematic point about the essence and quality of feminine purpose; Elizabeth has a more specific knowledge, and therefore a more astute understanding, than the older, richer, better educated and more worldly Darcy, of the extent of female opportunity and the achievement of pleasure by women. The heroine goes on to bring to her marriage with Darcy invaluable instructive skills to please, and to enhance the receptive temper of Pemberley.

Darcy, on his introduction to the unfashionable society of Meryton, at the ball, is censured because he seems "above being pleased" (58); the behavior there of Bingley's sister had likewise "not been calculated to please" (63). Elizabeth, on the other hand, adapts to any new scene with animated good humour. Arriving as a newcomer to Hunsford Parsonage, she forecasts the tedium and irritations of her stay with quiet irony, anticipating

> how her visits would pass, the quiet tenor of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Mr. Collins, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Rosings. A lively imagination soon settled it all. (193)

Another more welcome invitation away from Longbourn, her often oppressive home, is complicated by a frustration of her anticipation (she is, after all, a reader; Elizabeth looks forward as much to remembering and recasting her experience as to the actual "tour of pleasure" [189]: "'we <u>will</u> recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers, shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations...'" [190]). Elizabeth is "excessively disappointed" (264) when her projected travel to the Lakes is revised to include only Derbyshire. Elizabeth, however, soon rallies: "it was her business to be satisfied" (264). Elizabeth's brave compliance with unhappy or inconvenient circumstances is not, like Jane's, characterized by softness; for Jane is gentle and accommodating, but prone to immoderate hopes and quiet despondency. The heroine, canny as well as amicable, keeps her "happy" "temper" (264) amidst

every sort of trying society. That she "looked forward with delight to the time when" she and her new husband "should be removed from society so little pleasing to either" (392) underscores the resilient patience--the valour--she has maintained in her place as an indifferently educated unmarried woman with little fortune.

Embarrassed along with her sister at her mother's incongruous attitudes toward Bingley and Darcy when the two men have returned to Hertfordshire, Elizabeth feels "At that instant...that years of happiness could not make Jane or herself amends, for moments of such painful confusion" (347). The narratorial report of the overstatement belies both sympathy and irony; for Jane's reserved manner with Bingley and Elizabeth's blindness to Darcy's worth have contributed to the delay of their courtships. In addition, their future as unmarried women, though not romantically happy, would not, according to the narrative evidence, be dire. The alternatives in the novel to happy genteel marriage do not by any means appear to be intolerable. The subordinate position of women, whether unmarried, married, or widowed, living as daughters, wives, or servants, or even subjected to the harassments of those they are expected to respectfully serve, is seen as having compensations; besides, it is often women themselves who are to blame for domestic discontentment. When men are at fault, it is as husbands rather than as masters, and the effect of their behavior, which is silly rather than wicked, can be

adjusted. Charlotte Lucas contentedly chooses a marriage of convenience with Mr. Collins--which Elizabeth finds unthinkable--as "the only honourable provision" (163) for a woman such as herself. Whereas Charlotte must attend to "'the mince-pies'" (89) as a daughter, she concentrates on "her parish and her poultry" (244) as a wife. The parsimony of Mrs. Lucas in setting her daughters to kitchen-work, and Charlotte's hard-nosed schemes of advancement, are a necessary counterbalance to the unrewarding and excessive civility of their husbands. The self-congratulatory Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who also plots shrewd ways and means, and who loves "'to be of use'" (389), situates young ladies, such as the "'four nieces'" (199) of her daughter's companion Mrs. Jenkinson, as governesses. Their fates are not mentioned, only the felicitous fact of their collective employment; but another young lady, Miss Pope, seems to fare well, described by her mistress Lady Metcalf as "'a treasure'" (200). The occupation of female companion is regarded as an adjunct of governess; it provides the opportunity to effectively guide young women. Mrs. Jenkinson, slavishly attending to every detail of Miss De Bourgh's comfort, does not engage in conversation at dinner, nor does she encourage her sickly, listless young lady; rather, she

> was chiefly employed in watching how little Miss De Bourgh ate, pressing her to try some other dish, and fearing she were indisposed. (198)

Miss Darcy's first companion and housekeeper, Mrs. Younge,

has a far worse influence on her young mistress than the fostering of poor manners; the older woman counsels Georgiana to the immoral act of elopement. (Having been discharged, Mrs. Younge ends in London, "'letting lodgings'" [336] to the likes of the disreputable Wickham and his mistress Lydia Bennet.) She is replaced by Mrs. Annesley, "genteel and agreeable-looking," and "more truly well bred" (286) than the superior Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst; she tactfully helps Georgiana in the formalities and courtesies of receiving visitors. Two households are obviously bolstered by loyal housekeepers: Mrs. Reynolds at Pemberley, a "respectable-looking" (267) and "intelligent servant" (272), and Mrs. Hill at Longbourn, the servant "whom they could most trust" (305) during the time of Mrs. Bennet's self-indulgent hysteria. Each woman advances or at least upholds the family interest. The "trust" conceded to "'Hill'" (316), the upper servant in a genteel (but not great) house, obliquely honours her; her discretion while waiting upon an unreasonable mistress and managing a household further stressed by the presence of the four Gardiner children (the strain of which certainly affects Jane, who has, until the Gardiners and Elizabeth return, the children under her supervision and Mrs. Bennet under her care--even afterwards, she must "fetch her mother's tea" [315]), is a responsibility recognized with gratitude. The heroine brings to her marriage the helpful qualities of the other truly useful women she observes, especially those of

the exemplary Mrs. Gardiner; Elizabeth even magnifies the vivacious explanatory rhetoric demonstrated in the letter from her aunt detailing Darcy's part in resolving Lydia's fortunes; she takes time away from immediate family duties ("'The children have been wanting me this half hour'" [337]) to illuminate her niece, and to banter her with premature congratulations on her wedding. As a married woman, Elizabeth prudently and affectionately takes up the employment of a loving sisterly companion--"exactly what Darcy had hoped to see" (395)--and womanly educator of Georgiana, who she knows has erred in her gullible confidence in the scoundrel Wickham. As mistress of Pemberley, the heroine relieves Georgiana of the awkwardness she feels in her position as a very young hostess: Miss Darcy speaks in company only "when there was least danger" of her remarks "being heard" (286). Georgiana is also led to perceive that a woman may in conscience have a mind and a voice of her own. Mrs. Darcy communicates to her that obedient consideration for a husband differs from that due a brotherly guardian:

> Her mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By Elizabeth's instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself. (395)

Within the special circumstances of a wife's easy but profound relationship with her husband--even one who is, like Darcy, "'great'" (278)--her moral influence and domestic power are extensive; she has even a license to

tease. Such a wifely career allows, with an apparently narrow scope for women, the greatest feminine freedom to be, creatively, of use.

In the case of women such as the Bennet sisters, extensive learning is an impossible objective. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is shocked that they have not had the benefits of governesses and masters, although neither she nor her daughter has had any training in music, one of the most common forms of female education (Lady Catherine, however, assumes the natural, albeit untried, ability of herself and Miss de Bourgh: "'If I had ever learnt I should have been a great proficient'" [207]; "'Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her health allowed her to learn'" [209]). Caroline Bingley and her sister Mrs. Hurst play and sing together (56), but are bored without men to entertain them: "'a whole day's tete-a-tete between two women can never end without a quarrel,'" writes Miss Bingley (77). Kitty and Lydia Bennet likewise have no absorbing occupations or tenderness for their sisters which will keep them at home and away from the officers. Mary Bennet applies herself to "the study of thorough bass and human nature" (104), and makes "'extracts'" (55), but the effect of her laborious self-instruction is not inspiring; she is in conversation a caricature of a blue-stocking, foolishly echoing Dr. Fordyce-like prescriptiveness, and, in public, she treats her auditors to mediocre musical performances. (Mr. Bennet at the Netherfield ball curtly puts a stop to

Mary's display: "'That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough'" [142]). Georgiana's superior education is admirably conjoined with diligent application and practice--"'she plays and sings all day'" avers Mrs. Reynolds (269)--which means that she can entertain herself; she is too s[illegible] though, to know how to please others. Moreover, her good feminine formal education does not forestall bad judgement; Miss Darcy almost runs away with a man. Accomplishments are not the prime business of ladies; but Austen indicates that while accomplishments cannot be an end in themselves, they are not meant to be directed to the capturing of male attention, either. Rather, the leisurely employments of ladies are tools which should lend themselves to the greater accomplishment of sociability.

Elizabeth takes up a number of simple, incidental tasks to beguile the time in polite company. She is introduced, having come to her father's affectionate attention while "trimming a hat" (54); she takes up, in the evening in the Netherfield drawing-room after she has nursed Jane to rest, "some needlework" (92), or obligingly reads (unlike Mr. Collins) whatever is at hand ("she could suit herself perfectly with those in the room" [83]). Her employments are secondary to the main task of making herself agreeable--but not acquiescent--even amongst disagreeable people. Elizabeth, trying to make a point with Darcy about his saturnine public demeanour--"'I certainly have no talent,'" he admits unapologetically, "'of conversing easily...'"

(209)--compares the attainment of polite affability to that of feminine musical execution:

> 'My fingers...do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do...But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault--because I would not take the trouble of practising.' (209)

The art of polite, winning conversation is a matter of education and application, not innate talent. Darcy, overlooking the hint by responding with a pun ("instrument"/"perform"), reveals his capacity for adroit, gracious interchange: he replies that "'We neither of us perform to strangers'" (209). In fact, he has known her to be prevailed upon before "a large party" (70) at Lucas Lodge ("'Very well; if it must be so, it must'" [71]). Elizabeth does not intend to impress or to preen before Darcy or Colonel Fitzwilliam in their aunt's drawing room. Darcy is, however, more interested in her person than in her music; he moves "towards the piano forte," and stations "himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance" (207). But he is generally attracted first by her alacrity in social gatherings ("she sat down directly to the instrument" [207]), and certainly not by her beauty, bearing, or intellectual refinement. Aesthetic discrimination is therefore of little consequence to the heroine as an actor or as a desirable woman. The only Pemberley painting which she finds truly arresting (271) is the portrait of a smiling Darcy--she "fixed his eyes upon herself" (272). She finally recognizes and appreciates the

subject, his moral character, as desirable, and is pleased that he has desired her. Although the heroine, a "'studier of character'" (88), contends that the interest of the study lies in the fact that people "'alter so much'" (88), the only surprising alteration lies not in others, but in her understanding of them. Her unmarried, unpromising situation changes with her attitude: in Pride and Prejudice, intellectual or artistic achievement and hierarchical advancement attend the morality of social harmony. Education and economic ambitions should be subject, but are not irrelevant, or even a menace, to social order.

Elizabeth's talent for mockery and self-mockery is a sociable tool. When the Lucas and the Bennet women meet to "talk over" (65) the events of the night before at the Meryton ball, where Jane has been singled out by the celebrated newcomer Mr. Bingley, Elizabeth slighted by Darcy as "'not handsome enough '" (59), and Charlotte quite undistinguished as desirable or not, Miss Lucas is able to remove Jane from the focus of Mrs. Bennet's gloating review; Charlotte's digression may at the same time save her own feelings. She recalls that Elizabeth has overheard Darcy remark that she is "'only tolerable'" (66). Charlotte can proceed in this way because Elizabeth has already made fun of herself and admitted her dislike for Darcy. She has related the incident

> with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous. (59)

The heroine's taste and intellect are original and engaging. She briskly and cheerfully invests the conventions of the drawing room or ballroom with charm and importance:

> 'It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy.--I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.' (133-34)

In asserting the "'efficacy of poetry in driving away love,'" her hyperbole is not frivolous, for it debunks insipid literary and social forms, though it is fun:

> 'Everything nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away.' (90)

Elizabeth's inventive insults captivate by their self-implication:

> 'We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down with all the eclat of a proverb.' (134)

Ironically, he internalizes her very blunt speech about his "'ungentleman-like manner'" (224) as a proverbial insight: "'Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget...'" (376). Elizabeth must further educate Darcy in the art of her wit; he must learn to be "laught at" (380). His laughter is to be provoked by her feminine witticisms, informed by her generous but acute notions of place and propriety.

Jane Austen derides the dictates of a romantic/utopian vision of a uniquely feminine salvation through stormy passion, or alternatively, through the cultivation of formal reason, and grapples instead with the finer points of the position of the lady. Pride and Prejudice is peppered with

occurrences proceeding from a selective prescriptiveness which threatens hierarchical integrity. This is not to say that the authority of powerful men is exerted tyrannically. Mr. Bennet is wilful and heedless of the well-being of the women affected by his judgements only insofar as he rigidly decides in favour of his own peace. When his wife badgers Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet dismisses the case, requesting of his wife

> 'First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be.' (153)

Her father's defense of his liberty of mind and territory from his wife's interference and intrusion is to Elizabeth's benefit in this instance--for what if he, too, perversely insisted on her marriage? Elizabeth would be in the hackneyed dilemma of the distressed and innocent female. But Mr. Bennet's similarly irrevocable decision not to forbid Lydia, whose presence annoys him, to leave for Brighton, is disastrous for the family. The circumstances of Lydia's elopement are sadly banal rather than tragic: considering the relationship of Lydia and Wickham, Elizabeth muses that

> their elopement had been brought on by the strength of her love, rather than by his; and she would have wondered why, without violently caring for her, he chose to elope with her at all, had she not felt certain that his flight was rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were the case, he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of having a companion. (330-31)

There is in Austen's novel no overpowering force of masculine feeling to disturb or bestow feminine

tranquillity; rather, women are affected by the exercise of the individual moral judgement within the boundaries of social and religious convention. The heroine cooperates with heart, mind, and even strength (she is an ardent walker) in a social program which modestly befits the desires of both sexes of her class.

## Conclusion

"Are Women Human?"[1]

Dorothy L. Sayers

"The most transient visitor to this planet, I thought, who picked up this paper could not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of patriarchy."[2]

Virginia Woolf
A Room of One's Own

"From each according to her ability . . . to each according to his needs."[3]

Margaret Atwood
The Handmaid's Tale

"You don't pay me, you live here
she said, pushing back his money, the tip, too"[4]

Erin Mouré
"Shock Troop"

"Le coeur d'un savant est un puits ténébreux ou sont engloutis bien des sentiments avortés qui remontent a la surface en guise d'arguments."[5]

Natalie Barney

Two articles in a recent critical publication concerning literature and sexuality in eighteenth-century Britain, in concentrating on gynecology, on the need in one case for violent obstetrical extraction and on the occurrence, in the other case, of a bizarre uterine dysfunction, affirm the discourse which subjects women to male intervention. By

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[1]Dorothy L. Sayers, Are Women Human? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971).
[2]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Granada, 1929): 33-34.
[3]Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Limited, 1985) 111.
[4]Erin Mouré, "Shock Troop," in Fireweed Issue 14 (Fall 1982): 80.
[5]Natalie Barney, Aventures de l'esprit (New York: Arno Press, 1975) 25.

ignoring the social construction of gender, Arthur H. Cash in "The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr. Burton"[4] and G. S. Rousseau in "Nymphomania, Bienville and the rise of erotic sensibility,"[5] approve the control of women--or rather, of female minds and female bodies--by rational, professional men. The gap in Cash's treatment between the evidence of the eighteenth-century obstetrical horrors supervised by man-midwives with their old tools and surgeons with their new instruments, and Cash's abuse of midwives for their resistance to the developing male science of female physiological crises, is politically instructive. Cash in his "literary" history is set on privileging the progressive mechanization and masculine institutionalization of obstetrical practice, to the detriment of midwives, for the supposed good of women. Ironically, Cash finds it satisfactory that Sterne's satiric premise in Tristram Shandy has as its basis the deathly arrogance and absurdity of science, especially as it takes the "portly"[6] form of the man-widwife Dr. Burton, who inspires the caricature of Dr. Slop:

> Sterne found in Dr. Burton and his books a new and inspiring vision of foolishness, one which impinged upon the most fundamental human experiences--generation, nativity, infanticide and hopeless

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[4]Arthur H. Cash, "The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr. Burton," in Sexuality in eighteenth-century Britain, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982) 198-224.

[5]G. S. Rousseau, "Nymphomania, Bienville and the rise of erotic sensibility," in Sexuality in eighteenth-century Britain, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1982) 95-119.

[6]Cash 199.

> surrender . . . That such questions of life, and such actual decisions of how and when to save life should be left to John Burton![9]

Cash goes on to cite the documentation of the horrible use of obstetrical instruments both by brutal, ignorant man-midwives, and by "obstetricians" of "the upper classes."[10] Dr. Smellie went so far as to counsel physicians "to hide their instruments"[11] to forestall the panic of labouring women. The photographs provided by Cash of these instruments would indeed confirm the propensity for patients' fears; so does Cash's personal account of his participation in a scientific demonstration of the painful and damaging effect of Dr. Burton's forceps. (It is intriguing that a woman doctor, Margaret Rowbottom, performs the demonstration on the scholar's male hands; such instruments were invented for male hands, to work upon the sexual core of women.) Despite these "objective" facts and accounts, and Cash's contention that Tristram Shandy exhibits, in its satire on the fatuous, detrimental obstetrical hypotheses of Dr. Slop and Walter Shandy, a humane interest in women, the literary historian maligns the "constant, bitter antagonism of midwives toward the man-midwives," complaining that "The prolonged attack of this ignorant group of women upon the new science was reprehensible, but effective."[12] (Cash does not explain the effects.) Unbelievably, given that Cash himself acknowledges

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[9] Cash 201.
[10] Cash 206.
[11] Cash 207.
[12] Cash 207.

as undeniably terrifying the instruments of "death"[13] used by doctors, he suggests that "the most insidious and knavish altercation of the midwives and their allies was on the danger of obstetrical instruments."[14] Rhetorically, Cash's vituperative treatment of polemical midwives complements Sterne's of the tendentious Burton: the reader extrapolates that in between the ignorant, untrained (by men) midwives and the excessively self-serving Burton, lies, supposedly, the golden mean of the educated male physician (so help us).

G. S. Rousseau also denies that the impingement of male medicine on women's lives is even problematic, much less a political issue. He, like Cash, diverts attention from the events of speculative experiments on female patients to focus on the connection of (male) scientific practice to (male) literary invention. Rousseau perceives a relationship between "a particular development in the history of medicine," the attribution of "nymphomania," to the excesses of the feminine imagination (he certainly does not suggest whether such a condition exists outside the male imagination), "with the evolution of aesthetic thought in the eighteenth- century."[15] Rousseau concludes that Bienville's theory is "another example of the ways that science reinvigorates art,"[16] citing as an example the Marquis de Sade's plagiarism of the medical precepts of

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[13]Cash 209.
[14]Cash 208.
[15]Rousseau 105.
[16]Rousseau 105.

"philosophers and physicians"[17] such as Bienville in his literature. The ideological relation of Bienville's misogynic pseudo-science to Sade's woman-hating pornography is beyond Rousseau; he interjects as a curiosity that "in the works of Sade brothels and bawds seem to exist only to be explained in technical language...."[18] Sade's cool objectification of the feminine experience and the reduction of human relations to physiological anatomization, is a matter of literary historical puzzlement.

Such intellectually respectable but viciously anti-feminist "literary history" points to the need for a sociology of literature, for an overtly ideological criticism. The mere description of literary texts is insufficient; textual history is not simply a matter of putting a text within a context, of slotting a document between a lot of other documents, like shelving books according to a cataloguing system. Fiction needs to be described within its material history; critical inquiry is fostered by a sense of the dialectic within the linguistic-political framework. A predetermined relation to texts, instanced in our objectifying distinctions between prose genres--history/tale/novel--can be reconstructed by the attempt to realize the ideological points of construction, rather than the taxonomy of style (plot, character, setting . . . ) in fiction. The attempt to

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[17]Rousseau 110.
[18]Rousseau 112.

reconstruct methodology requires an interdisciplinary impulse, the movement towards a synthesis of imposed academic "genres"--philosophy/history/psychology/literature/science--which uncovers the constructedness of social institutions, of hierarchies of power which perpetuate the "incorrigible propositions,"[19] the unquestioned axioms, so exasperating to those who are meant to be on the bottom:

> "ah well it s a
> tautological world boss"[20]

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[19]Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood, The Reality of Ethnomethodology, quoted in Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978) 4.

[20]Louise Armstrong, "The Circle Game (II)," in The Women's Review of Books 4.6 (March 1987) 10.

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