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Beyond Conduct:
Three Eighteenth-century Women Moralists

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore the rhetoric and feminism of three prose works which span the eighteenth century: Mary, Lady Chudleigh's *Essays on Various Subjects* (1710), Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), and Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). These books are not merely part of a subliterary genre of conduct literature, nor merely documents full of historical and social data; they form part of the century's conservative institution of women's studies. Chudleigh, Chapone and More deplore the customary and frivolous system of women's education of their times, which helps to create weak, sensual, male-fearing, morally irresponsible wives and mothers. To varying degrees, each encourages women to become more virtuous and more intellectual, simultaneously raising the social reputation and subjective dignity of their sex. The discourses of virtue, religion, and conduct often camouflage the revolutionary nature of their authorship. Mitzi Myers explains that in the eighteenth century, "if women's alternative or counterpart models are not acceptably encoded in the prevailing male idiom, female concerns will not receive a proper hearing" ("Revolution" 202). While these women are careful not to suggest openly that women's roles and rights should expand, their texts equip women to survive in their presently limited realm. But they go beyond mere survival, mere prescriptions for conduct: to make womankind more worthy of respect and liberty, these women boldly assume the roles of authors and moralists, attempt to rebuild the female character from within, and often propose improvements upon the society she lives in. Hannah More, taking advantage of social crisis, even encourages women indirectly to influence the male realm of politics, and to save England from "the most tremendous confederacies against religion, and order, and governments, which the world ever saw" -- the French revolution (*Strictures* 3). I analyze and compare these texts through a close consideration of rhetoric, along with frequent comparison and contextualization with other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century conduct books and educational treatises for women.

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Introduction

Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Hester Chapone, and Hannah More are three women authors whose moral and educational works attempted to change the customary system of women's education, thereby enhancing women's subjective experience, and raising the reputation of the female sex. Their lives cover several generations, and their essays span more than a century of thought: Mary Chudleigh's *Essays on Several Subjects* was published in 1710, Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* in 1773, and Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* in 1799. Despite their distance in time from each other, they face similar concerns. Living within a society full of restrictions on female behavior, each struggles to find a reasonable ground for these rules, or an argument for changing them. For these women, proper conduct is merely the surface of life; they reach beyond for reasonable moral and religious justifications for their standards of behavior.

These three specific educational works share common elements: they are written by women, they offer a plan for women's education, they emphasize piety, and criticize the customs and opinions that affected the women of their time. But just because the authors were all eighteenth century pious women who wrote about female education and virtue, we cannot assume that they come to the same conclusions or follow the same methods. While I make their similarities a basis of comparison, I shall not attempt to force the three texts at hand into a single ahistorical model of women's educational writing.

In fact, their varied social contexts facilitate a more fruitful study. By looking at women moralists from three different segments of the eighteenth century, I can examine the ways in which opinion and tone shift according to each author's social conditions, and determine whether they share strategies regardless of their circumstances. Each author was heavily influenced by contemporary educationalists, and inherits the advancements made by earlier writers. Therefore a "horizontal" comparison with other conduct writers, as well as a "vertical" comparison among the three authors chronologically, will help to determine their relative degrees of innovation and risk. However, I do not propose

establishing a chain of influence between Chudleigh, Chapone, and More. There is no evidence that these women read each others' works, and it is impossible to determine a progressive or regressive trend in opinion through the works of these women alone. Their historical contexts, however, must be considered for a more detailed and sympathetic evaluation of their contribution to the tradition of women's advice books.

Although many eighteenth-century women's novels and poems have been studied, very rarely does one hear of an eighteenth-century woman educationalist besides the two well-known writers on the official boundaries of the century, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary, Lady Chudleigh's poetry has been studied by Marilyn L. Williamson and Clare Brant, but there is presently no study of the *Essays on Several Subjects*, her most mature production. The name of Hester Chapone often appears in discussions of learned women or conduct literature, but no one has yet taken time to analyze her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. Hannah More is well-known for her narrative and dramatic works; her non-fictional prose is not studied as often. Among several critics, Mitzi Myers has contributed an important portrayal of Hannah More's feminist sympathy. Perhaps these texts' close relationship with conduct literature or their didactic intention has inclined critics to place their prose works on a sub-literary shelf, where they are doomed to be summarized and quoted in surveys of the period and studies of "real" literature. Nancy Armstrong, however, has provided an important study of the relation of conduct books for women and the change in the class system at the end of the eighteenth century in her essay "The Rise of the Domestic Woman." Even she calls conduct books a "relatively ignored yet utterly familiar body of data" (134). These "data" in conduct literature are not bare scraps of opinion or fact; they are surrounded by complex rhetoric and are difficult to explore without attention to detail. Yet detail is outside the scope of a generalized study of ideology such as Armstrong's. In an age in which feminism and gender studies have bloomed, it is surprising that eighteenth-century women's educational prose has not more often been studied as literature. It has only just begun to be mined for its insights into the century's own conservative institution of "women's studies."

Because of the lack of unified scholarship in this area, it is difficult to describe exactly what kind of literature these women write. I call them conduct writers, moralists, and educationalists because their works are related to these genres: the conduct book, the moral essay, and the educational treatise. Conduct books, often called courtesy books, are a narrower kind of educational work, usually comprehending more instruction about manners than morals. Chudleigh, Chapone and More did not merely exhort women to obey the external rules of propriety, however; they were also concerned with providing female readers with proper thoughts and feelings, as John Locke was when he wrote *The Conduct of the Understanding* (1697). Mary, Lady Chudleigh's *Essays* are moral and philosophical essays and rarely deal with issues of decorum and detailed behaviour; they are wide-ranging in subject matter, and while all her essays are intended for women's moral improvement, only one essay is solely devoted to women's education. The *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* by Hester Chapone is more a conduct book than anything else; her work is very unlike Chudleigh's in its narrower range. However, Chapone instructs women in the religious reasons for following propriety. Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* is, as its title suggests, primarily a work on women's education and conduct, but also teaches at length the doctrines of evangelical Christianity and aspects of domestic management. The title of moralist more closely fits all three of these women than those of advisor or philosopher, but the title must not be understood as a limit on their roles or their subject matter.

Regardless of what generic categories these women fit into, they write in response to a similar ideological context. In general, they lived in a society which believed that some virtues were male and others female. For example, modesty, chastity, and emotional sensitivity were considered feminine virtues, while strength, courage, and reason were masculine. These virtues had socially approved expressions which could consist of behavioral signals as detailed as the length of a sleeve or a sentence, the tone of voice, or a downcast eye. Because of woman's dependence on man, it was incredibly important for her to follow these rules of decorum, as precise and trivial as they seemed, for a bad performance could shatter her fragile reputation or lower the esteem of parents or a husband. Under such pressure a woman could easily become a designing hypocrite, a

hysterical madwoman, or a passive slave. Moralists understood that education, not just social pressure, was necessary to produce the virtuous woman. A woman moralist could intelligently revise these images of ideal woman in her educational works, or simply instruct women to become a reflection of her society's expectations.

The average education for women of the upper class, and increasingly in the eighteenth century, the middle class, focussed on preparing girls to enter the marriage market. Women were taught singing, dancing, needlework, French, feminine deportment, the decorum of social intercourse, and uncritical submission to human authority. They were taught these accomplishments mainly for the purpose of attracting a rich husband. Moralists and educational reformers of the century, both men and women, complained that such a training produced women who were superficial coquettes, useless in marriage, and whose behavior and desires were capricious. Nancy Armstrong forwards the idea that, in general, moralists were attempting to make femininity less dependent on bodily appearance and physical labour. Ideal womanhood was contrasted with aristocratic performance on one hand, and the labour of the poor on the other, yet had the sole purpose of rendering women more practical, stable domestic creatures:

> Conduct books attacked these two traditional notions of the female body in order to suggest that the female had depths far more valuable than her surface. By implying that the essence of the woman lay inside or underneath her surface, the invention of depths in the self entailed making the material body of the woman appear superficial. The invention of depth also provided the rationale for an educational program . . . [which] strove to subordinate the body to a set of mental processes that guaranteed domesticity. (114)

In this view of conduct books, there seems to be no freedom for the woman, even if she is educated in great depth, for all is to be subservient to the goal of guaranteeing domesticity. The question is whether all three of these women moralists had this goal in mind, or whether the discovery of depths of woman's self created a subjective freedom of its own. Some educational reformers who believed women must be educated in virtuous

conduct definitely had the goal of domestic subordination in mind. For example, in 1762 Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in the fifth chapter of *Émile*,

> the education of the woman should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy. (as quoted in Wollstonecraft 80)

Therefore a male author had much to gain personally by honing a system which would train women continually to meet this goal. But Rousseau's proposal contains many moral contradictions and debasing assumptions about women which other theorists of the century hoped to elucidate and resolve. For example, how could a woman whose education bends her soul towards pleasing and being useful to a man have the independent judgment necessary "to advise" that man, or the wide knowledge "to educate" his children, male or female? Must a woman sacrifice her dignity and intelligence to "render [men's] lives easy and agreeable?"

Rousseau's view is chronically male-centered and utilitarian, but women writers were careful not to fall into the opposite extreme by saying that a woman must be educated only for herself. Nancy Armstrong writes,

> Through all their historical permutations, books telling women how to become desirable have held to the single objective of specifying what a woman should desire to be if she wishes to attract a socially approved male and keep him happy. (5)

However, Chudleigh, Chapone and More do not hold male approval as a carrot in front of a donkey. They attempt to lift women's minds above winning and keeping a husband, and offer them more noble rewards. A woman's mind filled and exercised by faith and knowledge was a goal to be desired in itself. Miriam Leranbaum judges that, compared with male writers, "as a whole the women show appreciably less concern for pleasing men and more concern with moral and intellectual seriousness" (299). But these moralists still

desire social harmony as one of the end results of education -- women, to be happy, had to be virtuous as well as intellectual. "Mid-eighteenth-century Englishwomen were uncomfortable about being known as learned ladies," explains Sylvia H. Myers, for some thought that "learning might encourage sexual laxity" ("Bluestocking" 279, 281). They had to assure people that a woman's educated mind did not necessarily result in sexual promiscuity, atheism, or uselessness. None of the eighteenth-century moralists challenged the notion that besides women's duty to their own soul, their most important and noble duties lay in piety, charity, and the domestic roles of daughter, wife, mother, and friend. Mary Astell, a friend of Mary, Lady Chudleigh's, complains of the social frustrations a learned woman must face if she is not careful to present herself properly:

> if in spite of all Difficulties Nature prevails, and [women] can't be kept so ignorant as their Masters wou'd have them, they are star'd upon as Monsters, Censur'd, Envy'd, and every way Discourag'd, or at the best they have the Fate the Proverb assigns them, *Vertue is prais'd and starv'd.*" (*Reflections Upon Marriage* 85)

Because of these difficult conditions, if any of the three moralists here studied are feminists, they are certainly of a different brand than we know of today. No woman writer of the eighteenth century, with the tentative exception of Mary Wollstonecraft, dared to suggest social, legal, or political equality with men. Mary Astell defines the limits of women's power: "our only endeavour shall be to be absolute Monarchs in our own Bosoms" (*Proposal I* 179) -- in her day this power was a significant achievement.

Women moralists had reason to be afraid of censure in the eighteenth century, but they should not necessarily be pictured as "protofeminists" with trembling pens. They knew their limits, and instead of brazenly destroying, transgressing or subverting them, conservative women writers observed and used the powers of will and of words. Without changing the standards of feminine decorum, they saw that a woman still had choices. Either she could learn the rules of proper behaviour and follow them mechanically, or she could search into the reasons behind them and seek to match her action with her will and understanding. By reasoning, writing and educating a new generation, women could slowly change the ideals of womanly virtue, while helping younger women to cope with

the standards in existence. Women moralists did not simply invent new rules or restate well-known requirements; they attempted to provide a reasonable foundation for proper behavior, and a method whereby a woman could achieve an ideal state (variously defined). In these works, obedience is not synonymous with oppression. A woman could rebel as mindlessly as she could obey, or, through reason and self-persuasion, she could retain a separate identity and choose actively to obey or quietly dissent. Education provided a means of withdrawing from, challenging, or accommodating culture.

For the purposes of this study, then, I will consider moralists as positive and feminist to the degree that they endow women with intellect, active will, and an identity separate from society, and to the degree they offer women any kind of subjectively real power or pleasure. A subjective improvement in women's experience is a worthy, yet difficult attainment in the context of the eighteenth century. Chudleigh, Chapone and More did not focus on class structures or political ideas, although they were affected by them. Therefore, while the intersection of gender and class is an important issue, I will confine my study to the rhetoric of gender and morality, and will only bring in issues of class and politics when relevant.

The simple fact that these women wrote educational and religious works is promising in a feminist sense. A book on female education implies a belief that women's morality and conduct was not part of their nature, but must be learned. Women could therefore be redesigned. Education is the most powerful argument against misogynists who accused women of characteristic vices that were inherited from Eve or resulted from the different composition of their bodies. In 1790 Catharine Macaulay asserted in her *Letters on Education* that all those vices and imperfections which have been generally

> regarded as inseparable from the female character, do not in any manner proceed from sexual causes, but are entirely the effects of situation and education. (Letter XXI, 202)

Another element of these works which could be harnessed for its empowering effects for women is religion. Of course, religion could be negative: God's laws are too easily associated with man's laws so that oppressive hierarchies seem natural and divinely

ordained. But within a woman's psyche religious freedom can be a sufficient basis of self-esteem and happiness. As Gail Malmgreen writes,

> religion was many things for women, a shelter, an escape, a consolation, a justification, a discipline, an inspiration, and, on occasion, an arena for rebellion against the prescriptions of male authority and conventional morality. (Malmgreen 8-9)

The idea of a threatening, authoritative, omniscient God can be used as an extension of the social surveillance of women's obedience, but more benevolent ideas of God can also provide a woman with a sense of significance and worthiness as an object of divine love. Even the approved external forms of worship and feminine piety could be helpful, for some women

> made their faith a means of escape from domestic confinement, or a statement of individual identity. Religious commitment and expression was, after all, an approved outlet for female assertiveness -- within limits. (Malmgreen 5)

Therefore the religious education proposed in some of these women's texts could make a large difference, both positive and negative, in women's subjective experience.

In order to compare these three works with each other and with other educational writing, several questions can be asked which relate to issues of authorship, intellectual strength, moral philosophy, and feminism. Concerning authorship, one may ask, what were their motives for writing, and their vision of the ideal women of the next generation? Writing and publishing was not easy for women, and required exceptional social circumstances and education. How, then, did these women establish their authority as published moralists, and how did they defend themselves from censure? Next we may consider their educational philosophy. Each of these authors desires women to have stable principles, but a woman could found her moral standard on various bases including her own conscience or reason, classical philosophy, Christianity, contemporary moral thought, or the expectations of her family and friends. The origin of their principles determines the flavour and depth of their works. For example, a moralist could choose to use emotional or intellectual persuasion, based on her idea of whether women should be more sensitive

or more reasonable (that is, in eighteenth-century terms, more feminine or more masculine). Thus their proposed educational systems could borrow from traditionally male studies to different degrees. One advice author may emphasize inner morals more than outer manners, another may consider proper manners and social success equally as important as their virtuous or reasonable motivation. Therefore some moralists could be more intellectually challenging, others more superficial or practical. And finally, it is most important to consider what the possible psychological and social consequences are of these women's suggested systems of education. Do they actually contribute to the happiness and improvement of women, or do they discourage and limit them? Which feminist aspects of their works have been overlooked, and which of their blunders and blind spots (as we may perceive them in a modern context) should be forgiven, or at least understood? As I attempt to answer these questions, I will better understand the intrepidity of these women moralists as they venture to write "beyond conduct."

Chapter One

Mary, Lady Chudleigh, *Essays on Several Subjects*

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries writing by women in the higher ranks encouraged the ladies of their class to give up the trifling employments of their leisure time and to become devoted scholars for their own benefit. Mary, Lady Chudleigh lived during a period of unprecedented publishing by women which began in the 1640s. Katherine Phillips (1631-64) wrote poetry in which retirement was the means to finding self-fulfillment, and Chudleigh follows in her footsteps. In the last decade of the century, men and women wrote and replied to a barrage of misogynist satires. Chudleigh herself replied to an angry-spirited wedding sermon. Mary Chudleigh, growing up during the civil war and observing the moral and political changes of the restoration of King Charles in 1660, lived in an era of general upheaval, as well as feminist debate. Her intellectual feminism was influenced by the rationalism of her century, and she reacted against the loose morals of the Restoration gentry. Although Chudleigh was politically and socially conservative, her writing shows a forceful intelligence in the defense and improvement of all women. She wanted to change the common opinion that women had weaker minds than men, and in her poetry complained about women's subservient role in marriage.

Mary, Lady Chudleigh, author of *Essays on Several Subjects* (1710), was baptized Mary Lee in Devon on August 19, 1656. Both her parents encouraged her to study, and she continued to pursue her interests as a wife and mother. She married George Chudleigh March 25, 1674, but not much is known about the happiness of her marriage -- if the tone of her writing is any hint, it was a sour and distant one. In other areas of life, she endured sorrow. She gave birth to five or six children, of whom four died very young; her mother died around the year 1700. During the last ten years of her life, in which she published much of her writing, Chudleigh "was severely ill with a form of crippling rheumatism which eventually took her life" (Ezell, *Chudleigh* xxi). She died on December 15, 1710, the same year in which her essays appeared in print.

Although her family's memoir records that Mary Chudleigh wrote manuscripts of "two tragedies, two operas, [and] a masque," among other things, these have never been found (Ezell, *Chudleigh* xxxv). Her first published work is the dialogue poem *The Ladies Defense* (1701), a response to a sermon by Reverend John Sprint about marital obedience, *The Bride-Woman's Counsellor* (1699). In 1703 her *Poems* appeared in print, which included the popular poem "To the Ladies". There were four editions of the *Poems*, and her influence extends well into the eighteenth century. Ezell notes that the poem "To the Ladies"

> seems to have appealed strongly to her eighteenth-century female readers: contemporary copies of it, for example, can be found transcribed on the flyleaf of the Shakespeare First Folio owned by Elizabeth Brockett and also in Elizabeth Dottin's manuscript volume of Bishop Henry King's poems. (*Chudleigh* xvii)

Chudleigh's poem on John Dryden's translation of Virgil graced his volume; the poets were acquainted with each other's work and enjoyed a mutual respect. After her poems were published in 1703, she began to write her *Essays on Several Subjects.* Elizabeth Thomas, a poet and close friend of Mary Chudleigh's, wrote several poems in her praise contained in *Miscellany Poems*, 1722. Later in the century Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate* (1774) praised Chudleigh. Chudleigh was not an eminent poet, but neither was she completely forgotten. She was included in several biographies of poets over the next two centuries: *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) by George Ballard, *The Lives of the Poets* (1753) by Theophilus Cibber, the *Biographium Faemineum* (1766) and Mary Hays' *Female Biography* (1803), Jane Williams' *The Literary Women of England* (1861) and *The Dictionary of National Biography* (Ezell, *Chudleigh* xxxii).

As yet, very few studies have been done on Mary Chudleigh's writing, and there is scant information about her life. The only modern edition of her works appeared as recently as 1993, as part of the Oxford series *Women Writers in English 1350-1850*, edited by Margaret Ezell. It is perhaps because of their previous inaccessibility, and because Chudleigh's essays stand in Mary Astell's shadow (they are not as overtly polemical or controversial) that they have not yet received the attention they deserve.

Chudleigh wrote seventeen essays, on the following subjects: knowledge, pride, humility, life, death, fear, grief, riches, self-love, justice, anger, calumny, friendship, love, avarice, and solitude. Mr. Ballard says of them,

> They appear to be, not the excursions of a lively imagination . . . so much as the deliberate results of a long exercise in the world, improv'd with reading, regulated with judgment; softened by good breeding, and heightened with sprightly thoughts and elevated piety. (As quoted in Reynolds 146)

Compared with modern feminist authors, and well-known historic feminist essayists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Chudleigh's effect on society through her essays is almost negligible. Her mentor and friend Mary Astell advocated the creation of a ladies' university retreat in her *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, but her dream was not fulfilled. Yet Astell's influence spread to numerous writers including Chudleigh. Chudleigh did not intend to effect radical social or political change, nor did she propose the founding of a women's college. But her works press for a change in the morals of her readers, and through them the morals of the upper class, who she then hoped would inaugurate just laws and healthy customs. She was also deeply concerned about raising women's reputation for knowledge and virtue, the acquisition of which would bring inner happiness to women and peace to their relationships. Her essays, while they did not cause a social revolution, nor raise her to the height of literary reputation, were intended to strengthen women and encourage them to aspire to intellectual and moral liberty.

While Chudleigh's satire *The Ladies Defense* flies in the face of male authority, defying it with anger and thus revealing insecurity, her poetry ranges from religious and occasional verse to the praise of friends such as Mary Astell ("To Almystrea"), and exercises an autobiographical voice. Her final work, her essays, are her most stable and mature production: they unite the boldness of her early defensiveness with the contemplative and tender spirit of many of her poems, and add to this the confident, wise voice of a sage. While her approach and genres changed over her life, she considered her essays as her crowning achievement. In her introduction to *The Ladies Defense* she expresses a need for the kind of teacher she feels she has become when she writes her

essays. The genre of essay-writing gives her authority as a teacher, and with this she combines elements of all her previous writing: satire, autobiography, poetic contemplation. She has Mary Astell's advice on writing in mind when she decides to mix together poetry and prose, and vary her tone from serious to satiric to instructive.[1]

Mary Chudleigh is influenced by male and female writers in several genres. Her closest mentor is Mary Astell, whose style and sentiments reappear in Chudleigh's essays. The popular conduct book *The Ladies Calling* (1667), attributed to Richard Allestree, was read and recommended by Mary Astell. Chudleigh echoes some parts of Allestree's pious and zealous tone, but Chudleigh's point of view and authority are different because she advises her own sex. The genre of the essay sequence is only beginning to become popular; among her precursors are Bacon and Locke. Her essay "Of Death" has elements of Bacon's first essay by that title, but the similarity ends there. There is no definite chain of influence between her essays and other earlier ones. Like that of Locke, Chudleigh's moral-philosophical bent runs back to the Classical philosophers through Dryden's and other men's translations. But Chudleigh's *Essays* are unique. The germ of her essays, especially "Of Knowledge: To the Ladies," seems to be contained in her own dedication and preface to *The Ladies Defense*.

Mary Chudleigh considers the dedication one of the most important parts of her publications. In her preface to the essays she complains that the printer Lintott's omission of both dedication and preface to *The Ladies Defense* "left the *Reader* wholly in the Dark, and expos'd me to Censure" (248). Lintott, likely motivated by excitement over gender controversy and the money it could earn him, exemplifies how little respect men could have for women's reputation as authors. Wisely, Chudleigh and other women avoided the presumption of dedicating their writing to men. The *Essays* are offered to the princess Sophia, a powerful and well educated woman. In her preface she explains that her *Essays*' design is to advise women "to prefer Wisdom before Beauty, good Sense before Wealth, and the Sovereignty of their Passions before the Empire of the World," and her living

[1] Astell describes the importance of balancing the "sublime" style with the "plain and simple", the "severe" with "florid," "strong" sentences with "Easy and Perspicuous" sentences (*Proposal*, part 2, 183).

example is princess Sophia, whom she asserts is both wise and beautiful, sensible and wealthy, self-controlled and powerful (248). Likewise, Mary Astell's dedication of the second part of her *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1696) invokes the Princess Anne as a model to her readers. She says that Anne's "Countenance and Example may reduce to Practice" what her essay "can only Advise and Wish" (*Proposal II*, 137). Chudleigh's dedication also asks for Sophia's protection. The words reveal Chudleigh's concern for her reputation as author as well as the reputation of her essays. She lays herself, she says,

> with a delightful Trembling at your Royal Highness's Feet; where, together with my self, I beg Leave to lay the following Essays. Pardon the Presumption of this Address, and suffer your great Name to be their Protection from the Assaults of Malice and Envy, and a secure Refuge for their Author . . . (245)

Her poem, *The Ladies Defense*, which is dedicated "To All Ingenious Ladies," is written with similar motives, begging ladies that "you will be so generous as to receive it into your Protection, and so obliging as to let the Affection with which 'twas written, compensate for its Faults" (4). Other female authors of her time were equally conscious of a trusting relationship between themselves, their works, and their patronesses. Judith Drake, the probable author of *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex* (1696)[2], writes in her dedication to the Princess Anne of Denmark,

> Our Sex are by Nature tender of their own Off-spring, and may be allow'd to have more fondness for those of the Brain, then any other; because they are so few, and meet with so many Enemies at their first appearance in the World. (Sig A2)

By devoting their texts to eminent women, Chudleigh and others are signalling their class and sexual allegiance, and implying that the only protection they beg is from the friendship and common interests of other noblewomen.

Though she often makes humble gestures in her preface, Chudleigh is not timorous about her authority. Chudleigh's address "to the Reader" begins in a striking manner: she

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[2] A text mistakenly attributed to Mary Astell

jumps headlong into her topic with an aphorism which is the main thesis of her essay collection:

> That the Pleasures of the Mind are infinitely preferable to those of Sense, intellectual Delights, the Joys of Thought, and the Complacencies arising from a bright and inlarg'd Understanding, transcendently greater and more satisfactory than those of the Body, . . . has, through all Ages, been an acknowledg'd Truth, a Truth that comes attended with all the convincing Evidences that can be desired, and will soon be found to be undeniably so by all such as will be at the Pains of making the Experiment. (246)

Her boldness and sprightliness come across in the words "infinitely preferable," "Delights," "Joys," "Complacencies," "bright and inlarg'd Understanding". These are all words which connote desire and agency. She does not begin with apologies, or with a focus on herself as author -- she begins with a truth acknowledged by time, wise philosophers, and human experience, placed in a complex, ornamental sentence structure. These are non-gendered philosophical truths and Chudleigh confirms their relevance to women's lives. She goes on to advertise the desired product of this belief: the wise, strong, patient, joyful person . . . like herself. These delights, she testifies,

> have been long the dear, the favourite Companions of my solitary Hours . . . I cannot only be contentedly, but even chearfully alone; they fill up all the Spaces, all the Intervals of Time, and make my Days slide joyfully along. (246)

In her first three paragraphs Chudleigh provides her educated reader with a powerful incentive to read further. She has not only established the desirability of what she is going to teach, but has initiated a personal mentor relationship between herself and the reader.

Except for her dedicatory plea for protection, Chudleigh makes very few decorous gestures of humility: she does not seem to be ashamed of her status as woman writer. Margaret Ezell has argued in *The Patriarch's Wife* that it is unreasonable for critics to assume that just because a woman published under her own name she opened herself up to

harsh criticism for transgressing her sexual limits.[3] Many seventeenth-century authors, regardless of gender, show evidence of insecurity over publication. In prefaces and dedications, authors often give a history of the text in order to clear themselves from charges of writing for fame or financial reward. For example, Locke's dedication to *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* asserts that "The importunity of friends is the common apology for publications men are afraid to own themselves forward to" (iii). But while Chudleigh uses the "my friends told me to" excuse for her *Poems on Several Occasions*, it is apparently entirely her own decision to print her essays. Her essays have an unique apology which represents Chudleigh as a confident author. She explains that they were originally written for her own pleasure and to cement her own learning:

> Though I cannot boast of having [my Faculties] improv'd, and must with Blushes own my Thoughts are infinitely inferior to multitudes of others; yet, mean as they are, to Me they prove delightful, are always welcome, they present me with new and useful Hints, with something that agreeably, as well as advantageously, entertains my Mind; the Notices they give me, I strive to improve by Writing; that firmly fixes what I know, deeply imprints the Truths I've learn'd. (246).

She is her own reader and the first judge of the *Essays'* value. She "imprints" her text on her own mind, and in this intermediate step towards publication, makes them more a part of herself. Chudleigh is also offering her meditative behavior and enjoyment of the essays as a model for her readers: they may prove entertaining, and they may even spur another cycle of thinking, meditating and writing in the reader. In her estimation, the essays are not only delightful, but truthful, and this is enough to justify publication: "The Subjects of which I write are worthy of their Attention;" they contain "Truth . . . though she appears in a plain Dress" (246). Chudleigh's retired lifestyle is a sufficient excuse for lacking what

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[3] Ezell explains that for women and men, manuscript circulation among friends and family was a more common form of public writing than printing: "it could lead to a reputation as a poet, scholar, or controversialist without a word having been published" (83). "Patriarchal sentiments may have dissuaded some women from publishing their writings -- along with reasons of geography, social status, and expense, which also deterred male writers -- but it did not stop the act of writing itself. . . . there were many Stuart women 'rich in Learning, yet adverse to show'" (Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife* 82).

she calls "a Fineness of Stile," a responsibility for which she leaves "to happier, more accurate Pens," of an unspecified gender (246).

Chudleigh's independence from the reader's approbation is unusually assertive: in fact, the language she uses makes her pleasures almost seem indulgent. She says the essays are "Products of my Retirement," but she is the initial and primary user of her own products (246). This fact contradicts most other ways of viewing women's conduct, and women's writing as an aspect of that conduct. As an author, Chudleigh is neither displaying her skills to extort flattery from men, nor "subordinat[ing] the body to a set of mental processes that guaranteed domesticity" (Armstrong 114). The first function of Chudleigh's essays is to give herself pleasure and leisure: They are "some of the pleasing Opiates I made use of to lull my Mind to a delightful Rest, the Ravishing Amusements of my leisure Hours, of my lonely Moments" (246). Her female readers are encouraged to do likewise. But if ladies neither read nor benefit from her writing, the *Essays* have already fulfilled part of their aim by pleasing and instructing their own author: Chudleigh holds herself utterly independent of praise and usefulness alike.

Chudleigh's curious narration of the history and purposes of her essays can be better understood by looking at Mary Astell's advice about writing. We may assume that Chudleigh read the second part of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, in which a considerable section instructs women about how and why they should write. Writing is intimately connected with thinking for Astell:

> The Method of Thinking . . . is to be observ'd in Writing, which if it be what it ought, is nothing else but the communicating to others the result of our frequent and deep Meditations, in such a manner as we judge most effectual to convince them of those Truths which we believe. (179)

Chudleigh, like many other women, probably made notes or copied quotations into a "commonplace book" while she read her Bible or the English translations of the classics. Her private meditations could then be adapted and made into essays.

After describing the original private use of her meditations, Mary Chudleigh then adds that the essays are presently published for the benefit of female readers alone, for "I am not so vain as to believe any thing of mine deserves the notice of the *Men*" (247). From an audience of one, she has merely expanded to an audience of one sex. Although contemporary readers will most likely read this exclusion as a simple convention of humility, it is said with deep irony. Her words make it possible that men will be seduced into reading further, or that they shall feel simultaneously flattered and excluded. Almost a century later, Hannah More describes how this mixture of flattery and exclusion is an insult commonly directed at women:

> it is unhappily almost established into a system, by the other sex, to postpone every thing like instructive discourse till the ladies are withdrawn; their retreat serving as a kind of signal for the exercise of intellect. (*Strictures* 206)

However, it could be interpreted as a deferential gesture, for in Chudleigh's dedication to *The Ladies Defense* (1701), she uses this technique when she excludes a portion of women from her audience:

> . . . what I write is wholly intended for such as are on the same Level with my self, and have not been blest with a learned and ingenious Education . . . and not for those who, by the greatness of their Virtue, and the Sublimity of their Wit, are rais'd to a Height above me . . . 'Tis only to such as are in the lowest Form, to the meanest Proficients in the School of Virtue, that I take the Liberty of giving Advice. (*The Ladies Defense*, dedication, 4-5)

By the time she has become the author of *Essays upon Several Subjects*, she asserts she is qualified to instruct all ladies, but not men. Men may read her essays if they desire, but her deferential exclusion protects them from being offended if she teaches what they think they need not learn from a woman, and it allows them to enjoy the sense of reading over a woman's shoulder. Her exclusion is also a defensive wall to keep her writing from being devalued. If only women may benefit from what she has to say, then only women have the right to criticize the content and style. If her essays do not deserve men's notice, then

implicitly the men do not deserve her notice as an audience to be pleased, and she has more freedom to write as she chooses. Although she makes the humble exception of men in her preface, later in her essays she expresses the wish that her audience could include them. For example, in "Of Riches" she writes, "I would, if 'twere possible, convince the World" (299).

Immediately after her dismissal of male readers, the use of the pronoun "they" to refer to her female audience is an unusual choice. It distances the readers she says she intends to target. Likewise, by referring to her essays as "them" and avoiding the use of "I" she puts distance between herself and what she has written. Women readers are in the grammatical passive: in her essays, the women will "be instructed," "they will there learn," and "will there be told" many harsh truths. Perhaps the passive is a signal of politeness. But Chudleigh may have another strategic reason for using the third person. She has said that her essays are not intended for men, but her preface could well be intended for the eyes of both sexes. She could be speaking with the male point of view in mind, justifying her purposes to male buyers. This directly contradicts the personal function her essays had while they were unpublished, as products for her own consumption. Here she is reassuring the men that there is something in the essays to benefit them indirectly. What husband or father would not be happy to see his wife or daughter "chearful and smiling amidst Misfortunes, submitting themselves with a decent Contentedness, with a becoming Resignation to the Allwise Disposal of their merciful Creator" (247)? Indeed, Mary Astell uses the same technique when she writes,

> It is therefore very much a Man's Interest that Women should be good Christians . . . She will freely leave him the quiet Dominion of this World, whose Thoughts and Expectations are plac'd on the next. (*Reflections Upon Marriage* 128)

This does not mean that Chudleigh's and Astell's programs for women's education are only tools to keep women in their places. Education is capable of fulfilling both functions at once -- it allows women to desire far more for themselves than their own usefulness, while they remain useful to the society around them.

While she speaks of women as "they," Chudleigh represents women's outward lives as full of misery and sorrow. She never overtly advises women to change or complain about their circumstances, as bad as they may be, and as much as they may be blamed on human weakness. Is Chudleigh's message oppressive to women, or uselessly fatalistic? Can women change their predicament at all? The next strategy in her introduction proves that she believes in courageous moral action on behalf of herself and others: she takes the opportunity boldly to defend herself and publish the disrespectful behaviour of her bookseller, Mr. Lintott. Chudleigh says she experiences the "Consciousness of having done Things agreeable to Reason, suitable to the Dignity of ones Nature," and this defensive stance creates an easy transition to the issue of Mr. Lintott and her poem *The Ladies Defense* (248). She is conscious of no wrong in writing and publishing her poem, but has not been treated with dignity by Lintott, who, in spite of Chudleigh's refusal, added *The Ladies Defense* to the second edition of her *Poems* without its preface or dedication. She is neither ashamed of her early poem nor afraid of Mr. Lintott when she stoops to rectify the harm done to her own reputation. She evinces self-esteem and independent judgment: "I think my self obliged, in my own Defence, to take some notice of it. . . . I judg'd it advisable to take this Opportunity to justify my self" (248). In this discussion Chudleigh assumes that her readers already know her well, if not through her poetry, at least through her reputation. She is not an example of unthinking passive submission to affronts and insults when she publicly rebukes Lintott as she once did Mr. Sprint.

By bringing up the controversy of her early satire, Chudleigh also creates an opportunity to remind her readers of some of the positive principles contained in *The Ladies Defense*. Her essays are written with the same motive which she had avowed in her dedication of *The Ladies Defense:* she strives to mold a new generation of women who will no longer give occasion to the degrading instructions contained in Mr. Sprint's *The Bride-Womans Counseller*. But it seems that her early satire is too controversial for her mature taste, at least without its dedication and preface. Perhaps because she has reflected on the uselessness of fighting fire with fire, she chooses to soften her early satire's message to defend her reputation and thus make her authorship of the essays more

respectable. In fact, in her dedication to her satire, Mr. Sprint is unworthy of her respect for this very reason: he is "a Person, who has not yet learnt to distinguish between Railing and Instruction, and who is so vain as to fancy, that the Dignity of his Function will render every thing he thinks fit to say becoming" (*The Ladies Defense* 3). Mr. Sprint is unqualified to be a teacher more by his impolite manner than his instructive matter. She blames Mr. Sprint, not for the content of his sermon, but for "his being too angry, for his not telling us our Duty in a softer, more engaging way" (*Essays* 249). Despite her complaints about Sprint's boorishness, she lets her anger show in *The Ladies Defense* in the character of Melissa. Chudleigh is hiding something in her self-defense, however. Her early satire does indeed argue against the content of his sermon: it disagrees with a man's control of his wife's conscience, and the idea that women must always behave amiably (even hypocritically) to deserve their husband's love, among other things. Apparently, even if the content of her works is often satirical and challenging to male authority, a dedication or preface is not the place for satire, but for cool reasoning, humility, and generosity to all parties.

Chudleigh's essays have as one of their goals "to contribute to the more regular Conduct" of women's lives, and therefore her essays have a goal in common with the genre of conduct books. The most popular conduct book for women in the late seventeenth century was Richard Allestree's *The Ladies' Calling* (1673).[4] Mary Astell quotes from *The Ladies Calling* in her second part of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, and writes, "that Authors Ingenious and Kind Advices, I heartily wish were not only to be seen in [ladies'] Closets, but transcrib'd in their Hearts and Legible in their Lives and Actions" (260). Both Allestree and Chudleigh aim at improving practical virtues, but Chudleigh does so indirectly and more generally.

There are many differences between *The Ladies' Calling* and the essays. These are gendered differences which confirm that if *The Ladies Calling* was not written by a man, it must have been written by a woman who does an expert job of concealing her

[4] Ezell notes that "Books discussing women's roles by women writers are far fewer in the seventeenth century than those by men" (*The Patriarch's Wife* 101).

gender.[5] Allestree keeps his distance from female readers by never condescending to use the familiar "you;" he always refers to "women," "the sex" and "they." *The Ladies Calling* reveals a male perspective even in its organization. It is divided into three sections based on women's relationship to men: virgins, wives, and widows. But Chudleigh's essays are, except for "of Knowledge," easily applicable to male readers as well. She focuses on the complete education of women: not only what is proper for women in man's eyes, but what is morally right or wrong for anyone, and why. She opens with an essay on knowledge because she believes that the basis of all virtue is knowledge, and a proper respect for one's mind. Allestree encourages (or flatters) women in his preface, but he does not encourage them to seek knowledge in the same ways or to the same degree as Chudleigh does. Allestree, like Chudleigh, realizes that women's virtue depends on their self-esteem. Therefore he reminds them of their influence on men (by citing the unsavory example of Delilah) and their power over the early education of children. He lists several women of classical times renowned for their learning. Momentarily dangling in front of women the flattering prospect of being equal to men in their mental powers, Allestree qualifies and finally withdraws it:

> And were we sure they would have ballast to their sails, have humility enough to poise them against the vanity of learning, I see not why they might not more frequently be entrusted with it; for if they could be secured against this weed, doubtless the soil is rich enough to bear a good crop. But not to oppose a received opinion, let it be admitted, that in respect of their intellects they are below men; yet sure in the sublimest part of humanity, they are their equals: they have souls of as divine Original, as endless a Duration, and as capable of infinite Beatitude. (*The Ladies Calling* Sig. B3)

Sexual equality in the spiritual sense is therefore, to Allestree, the woman's most secure foundation for self-esteem. Despite heavenly equality he has misgivings about women's

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[5] The eighteenth-century biographer, Ballard, argues that Lady Packington could be the author of the *Whole Duty of Man*, and the title-page of *The Ladies Calling* announces that it is by the same author who wrote *The Whole Duty of Man*. Myra Reynolds writes that "the consensus of expert opinion [is] now against the ascription of these books to her" (67).

earthly education because of the danger of intellectual pride and vanity, and his doubt whether they would have the strengtn ("ballast") to study. Between the lines of theoretical equality there lurks an unspoken fear of women being equally educated in reality. Thus having disposed of the education issue to the flattery of one sex and the security of the other, Allestree moves on to the meat of his instructions. The education of virgins, however, does receive some treatment under the division of chastity. To keep a young woman from "Foreign assaults," Allestree advises that ladies should "secure themselves by a constant series of Emploiments" among which are "the offices of Piety" (2.7) Between such activities the time should be filled by "acquiring of any of those ornamental improvements which become their Quality, as Writing, Needle-works, Languages, Music, or the like" (*Ladies Calling* 2.7-8). Any of these trifling activities, to be practiced for the sake of chastity, and only when one has free time from pious actions, is considered "a rational Emploiment" (2.8). Chudleigh, however, offers women a more rigorous rational employment in the form of a humanistic education. For her, education is not merely a time-killer to keep a woman's mind and body chaste, but a goal worthy to be sought in itself.

While *The Ladies Calling*'s first chapter discusses Modesty, Chudleigh's first essay is on Knowledge. It is the only essay specifically addressed to women, and it provides a foundation on which she builds in her later essays. Chudleigh's essay on Knowledge nurtures the reader's self-esteem and encourages her to be open and eager to learn. Her first sentence conveys both frustration and zeal: "When I look abroad into the World, and take a Survey of the Rational Nature, it grieves me to see what a vast Disproportion there is as to intellectual Endowments between the Men and Us" (251). She presents the disproportion as an injustice, and an unnatural state. The metaphor of economy makes education appear a free marketplace of competition, supply and demand. Women must be aggressive or they will be overlooked; they must "put in for a Share, to enter their Claims, and not permit the Men any longer to monopolize the Perfections of the Mind, to ingross the Goods of the Understanding" (251). Only idleness and naiveté can reduce each woman's worth: "I would not have them suffer themselves to be willingly dispossess'd of their Reason, and shut out of the Commonwealth of Learning: Neither

would I have them so far impos'd on, as to be made to believe, that they are incapable of great Attainments" (251). Women's education, therefore, is in the same context as men's education; they are not segregated. Women are consuming the same educational goods, and vying for positions as stars in the same firmament.

To convince women they will not be alone in the female search for knowledge, Chudleigh uses the convention of a list of illustrious women.[6] However, Chudleigh's list is unique because it admits that knowledge and virtue are often handicaps to a woman in her relationships with men. Richard Allestree argues the contrary: "such an [illegible] there is in vertue, that where 'tis eminent, 'tis apt to controul all loose desires; and [illegible] must be not only lustful but sacreligious, that attempts to violate such a Sanctuary" (*The Ladies Calling* 20). There are men, however, who violate virtuous women. At the end of her poetic list of women, Chudleigh writes of Amalasuntha, Queen of the Ostro[illegible] whose husband exiled and assassinated her:

> She'd all the Treasures Knowledge could impart,
> A Mind well furnish'd, and a gen'rous Heart.
> But these, alas! could not a Husband move,
> Could not perswade his barbarous Soul to love.
> Her shining Qualities glar'd much too bright,
> They shew'd those Vices he had hid in Night.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Virtue's no Shield, it rather does expose;
> The Bad are still the Good's inveterate Foes.
> Merit in them does always Envy raise,
> They hate the Persons they are forc'd to praise.
> (p.253, lines 59-64, 81-84)

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[6] Allestree uses this convention in his preface, and Bathsua Makin's *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) is largely based on a list of famous women.

While Allestree advertises the uncertain positive results of virtue and de-emphasizes the possibility of pain and conflict, Chudleigh tells her students that virtue is not a shield, and knowledge does not ensure that one will find a husband worthy of one's gifts. If her readers are to choose virtue, they must choose it for its intrinsic value, not for the worldly reputation and love they hope to gain from it.

With women's vulnerability in mind, it is not surprising that Chudleigh recommends a defensive strategy throughout her essays. She praises the ladies in France because they "begin to assert their Rights, and are resolv'd the Salic Law shall not extend to their Minds, shall not obtrude it self on their Intellectuals" (254). To assert Rights is a defensive concept here. It is not an extension of rights over those of men, but a resolution that a foreign law "shall not extend to their Minds." If women are to be offensive at all, their might is to be directed against conquering parts of themselves, such as their passions. Her retreat into the bosom is not an act of cowardice but of self-examination and self-mastery. In her essay on Grief, she describes her inner conquests: "as soon as I found any Disturbance within, any Tendency to Sorrow, Anger, Fear, or any other Disquieters of my Repose, I made a timely Resistance, never left contending till I'd vanquish'd my Opposers, and argu'd my self into a patient Submission, a calm Acquiescence of Temper" (295). The self is a woman's most precious country, and as such, "it becomes [women] to prefer the Serenity of their own Minds before all other Concerns" (296).

As Carol Barash notices in Mary Chudleigh's poetry, Chudleigh often uses metaphors of government to explain moral concepts.[7] Inspired by the queen Anne and the princess Sophia, Chudleigh sees the empire of Reason over the passions as analogous to the reign of women over countries. She validates the individual woman's mental and emotional struggles by aligning them with a heroic, monumental trope. The woman's enemies are not men, but parts of themselves: their inability to see truth, or to have a right value for things on an eternal scale of importance. The military energy of the reign,

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[7] Barash writes, for example, that Chudleigh "uses the Restoration, as trope, to link the authority of her own 'reason' to Anne's authority as monarch . . . Reason proves as embattled as the late Stuarts, and particularly Anne. . . . In her elegy on the death of the queen's son, Chudleigh's

however, is to be focussed on keeping inner peace, not assaying foreign conquest. The disappointments and sorrows of life are seen as military exercises. Chudleigh says, in her essay on grief, that Trouble

> has tended to the Improvement of my Mind, the Exercise of Virtue, and the fortifying of my Soul. Prosperity enervates, but Adversity gives a manly Firmness, fences us against the Allurements of Sense, the tempting Blandishments of Life, makes us retire into our selves, and seek Satisfaction where 'tis only to be found. (296)

Unlike the more common use of the military metaphor in literature, in which conquest is praised, the final result of the military campaign is not the occupation of foreign territories, but the successful defense, and the happy retreat to the peaceful, rightfully-owned homeland.

Another strategy Chudleigh recommends, besides defense, is retreat. However, Chudleigh makes certain that we know this retreat is not cowardly, not an escape to an easier life. In her chapter on solitude she recommends physical isolation, but speaks more often of mental retreat. She wants her readers to know themselves, to retreat into the hidden self, where there are no masks and one must be honest and humble. She prays, "teach me to retire into my own Breast, to set a Guard on my Thoughts, to be very careful of my Words, nicely circumspect in my Actions . . . " (267).

Retreat, then, can be used for self-control. But for Chudleigh, even the search for knowledge is an act of withdrawal from the world around oneself. She weaves ingenious metaphors of the understanding as both a country and a pregnant female body when she speaks of the search for knowledge:

> Would we but for some time withdraw our Eyes from outward Objects, and turn them inward, reflect seriously on our selves, pry into the secret Labyrinths, the shady, the obscure Recesses of our Souls, we should there find the *Embrio's* of

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identification with the queen's uncontrolled grief allows the female poet, like an Augustan monarch herself, to 'restore' the queen's emotional 'peace' through verse" (60-61).

> Science, the first Rudiments of Virtue, the Beginnings of all useful *Knowledge* . . . . (255)

Here Chudleigh is capitalizing on the way scientific philosophers like Francis Bacon picture nature as feminine and the inquiring mind as male. In the language of early English scientists, Ruth Salvaggio explains, "Nature [was] a realm long associated with the generative forces of woman:"

> Describing the scientist's need 'to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings,' Bacon speaks in revealing terms to the 'man' of the new science, instructing him not 'to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object . . . .'[8]

Salvaggio asserts that while this gendered metaphor excluded woman and femininity from the scientific process, making her a passive object like Nature, "it also holds forth the possibility of liberating her . . . by allowing us to reconceptualize woman's displacement not as the object of man's desire, but as the subject of her own actions" (25). This is exactly what Chudleigh has done. As part of the nature metaphor, she compares the woman's cultivation of understanding to the wise, economical management of a country. This assumes some correspondence between the queen's authority and responsibility, and every woman's duty to cultivate herself. As a queen of a country of self, and mother of scientific and religious truth, Chudleigh has control over her mind and its production of knowledge.

Much like her use of scientific metaphors, Chudleigh draws from religious genres and ideas to argue that women are naturally wise. Her notion that within each individual woman one "should hear the soft and gentle Whispers of Truth, which to every attentive List'ner, every humble Enquirer, will prove a happy Guide, a kind Director" has revolutionary implications (255). In the seventeenth century, most people agreed with Allestree and assumed that women were naturally more religious than men, and had a

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[8] Quoted from Francis Bacon's *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarium* (Salvaggio 17).

closer connection with God.[9] In fact, even Allestree considers the inner voice of women as an authority: God "has placed within them a Pillar of Cloud and Fire, sufficient to shelter and conduct them thro all the storms, all the intricacies that can occur in their journey to Canaan" (Sig C). Chudleigh's and Allestree's ideas seem very much like the doctrine of the inner light espoused by the Quakers of her day. Quaker women were bold enough to publish, preach, and become politically active. Women most often wrote about religion if they wrote at all; "the Quakers produced the single largest group of women who published their writings, both during the Commonwealth and afterward" (Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife* 93). In this era Quakers, Catholics, and Anglican women like Chudleigh shared the same culture of piety; Patricia Crawford says that the differences were only "matters of degree and emphasis," and determined by "the social level of the female believer" (76). Chudleigh's essays are influenced by this aspect of women's writing. She uses the pattern of women's religious genres like confession (autobiography) and prophecy (her utopian sections), infusing them with classical, philosophical ideas. In the same way, Chudleigh takes the common idea of women's inherent spirituality and extends it so that women have a source for general knowledge and wisdom inside them as well.

Chudleigh also uses the image of treasure-hoard or store-room, which is an actual place a female household manager would be familiar with. Inside ourselves, she writes in her essay "Of Knowledge," we "should find a Stock of our own sufficient to begin with, which, if well managed, will not fail of yielding us plentiful Returns" (255). The words "Stock" and "yielding" are part of the language of agriculture as well as finance. Chudleigh is asserting that women have inborn resources; that they are able to go far with the nature God has given them. "If to these Riches of our own we add Foreign Manufactures," such as books and conversation, "we shall make wonderful Progress, and prodigiously encrease our Wealth" (255). A country is made wealthy by trade only if it is not utterly dependent on foreign goods, and so a woman should learn from others while refusing to owe all her progress to other people's minds. Therefore a woman's retreat

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[9] Patricia Crawford explains that this special gift was thought of as God's compensation for the pain and risk of death in childbirth. Piety was fostered in the higher ranks by women's more retired, leisured lives (73-74).

into self is not an act of cowardice; it is a pious act of self-examination, a pseudo-scientific search for truth, and an affirming discovery of a country of their own which they can govern, cherish and fill with treasures.

Chudleigh gives us one of very few practical examples of how a woman can use retreat to her advantage. When a woman finds herself in "idle, trifling unprofitable Company, . . . such as can talk of nothing but what is not worth the knowing, of the little mean concerns of the Animal Life, their Domestic Affairs," self-examination and silence are a method of keeping pride at bay (255). A woman can profit from the most idle conversation by retreating: "Let us instead of censuring and despising them, retire into our own Breasts, and seriously ask our selves whether we are so Ignorant . . . And let us carefully endeavour to avoid those Rocks on which we see them split" (255). In this case withdrawal does not make the woman feel superior to others, or give her reason to shun their company.

In Chudleigh's proposed system of education for women, male knowledge takes precedence over traditionally feminine knowledge. Chudleigh cares not for the trivial kind of knowledge which has been the territory of her own sex. She complains that women talk of things "not worth the knowing, of . . . their Domestic Affairs" (255). But does it follow that she values all aspects of men's knowledge? Not without qualifications. The study of classical languages, the male marker of knowledge, she considers equally as superficial as female trifles: "What I would advise my self and others in relation to a course of Study . . . [is] to attend more to Things, than Words" (256). While male Rhetoricians are "quarelling about the Husk" of knowledge, she says women should be striving for the attainment of things that "will prove real Accomplishments to our Minds, true and lasting Ornaments to our Souls. And such are the Knowledge of God, and our Selves" (256). Mary Astell expresses the same preference for quality rather than quantity of knowledge:

> We will not vie with [men] in thumbing over Authors, nor pretend to be walking Libraries, provided they'll but allow us a competent Knowledge of the Books of God, Nature I mean and the Holy Scriptures: And whilst they accomplish

> themselves with the Knowledge of the World, and experiment all the Pleasures and Follies of it, we'll aspire no further than to be intimately acquainted with our own Hearts. (*Proposal*, Part 2, 179)

Chudleigh cleanses women's education of the trivial, vain aspects commonly found in the education of both men and women.

In "Of Knowledge" Chudleigh advises ladies about a course of study from the rudiments to the advanced levels. A list of books or subjects is a convention often found in educational texts in the seventeenth century such as Anna Maria van Schurmann's *The Learned Maid* (1659).[10] Chudleigh begins with the study of logic, then enumerates the benefits of geometry, physics (the study of nature), metaphysics (the study of being and God), geography, moral philosophy (including the Bible), history, and poetry. The fundamental studies of logic, geometry, physics and metaphysics are studies from which ladies have been kept at a distance because of a faulty estimation of women's intellect and their contracted sphere in society. Women feared ridicule for knowing too much about subjects considered unfeminine. A quarter of a century earlier, feminine borders of knowledge were expressed in terms of the scientifically ordered design of the solar system. Bathsua Makin, in her *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) complains that "A Learned Woman is thought to be a Comet, that bodes mischief, when ever it appears" (Sig A2). But Chudleigh redesigns the learned woman according to the way the scientists of her time turned the disordered, feminine idea of Nature into a reasonable, mathematical system. Ruth Salvaggio proposes that Isaac Newton's reshaping of natural philosophy was a process of excluding elements of disorder or mystery that were associated with aspects of femininity, namely "madness, fluidity, color, shade, and darkness" (x). Scientists like Newton, she says, imposed on themselves a discipline, an "attempt to halt the progression of desire that turns away from systematic definition toward pleasurable indulgences"; they attempt to rein in a curiosity about the feminine

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[10] Anna Maria van Schurmann of Utrecht's work, translated as *The Learned Maid* (1659) suggests women should learn an even wider range of subjects: "grammar, rhetoric, logic, physics, metaphysics, languages (especially Hebrew and Greek), mathematics, poetry, fine arts, and even

aspects of nature listed above (44). In these terms Chudleigh provides a rationale for a rigorous, masculine system of education. She argues that the exercise of study suppresses the feminized attribute of imagination, a kind of mental fluidity or non-solidity, and therefore prepares women to become scientists or philosophers. For example, Geometry is "useful to qualifie and prepare our Minds for the Contemplation of Truth . . . 'Twill enable us to fix our Thoughts, and give a check to that quickness of Imagination, which is seldom consistent with solidity of judgment" (257).

This rationale seems to have nothing to do with preparing women for the practical functions of their daily lives, but Chudleigh draws a connection. It helps women to become inwardly organized, and this inner strength forms the foundation of women's virtuous and intelligent obedience as a daughter, wife, or mother. Moral philosophy, where most conduct book writers begin, comes sixth in her list of subjects, for it is the study for which the other exercises have prepared the mind. Mary Astell writes, "without a good Understanding, we can scarce be truly, but never eminently Good; being liable to a thousand seductions and mistakes" (152). Without having any grounding in logic or the other more fundamental studies, a woman may by more easily swayed by a false argument, or be unable to understand the metaphysical basis of her duty.

Chudleigh's discussion of education prefers a modified version of the masculine humanistic system of education over the parts of a limited and frivolous female education. The last two studies on her list, history and poetry, are merely pleasurable extras, studies which women are commonly suffered to indulge. She shows a generosity in her inclusion of these apparently easier subjects. Ladies may read history "When we are tir'd with more intricate Studies," and "With such Amusements" as history "Poetry may claim a Place," but only in "our leasure Hours" (258). The drier, more difficult studies (except languages) are the meat of her regimen, since she believes women are weak in this area.

> I know most people have false Idea's of Things; they think too superficially to think truly; they find it painful to carry on a Train of Thoughts; with this my own

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the rudiments of professional knowledge, for instance, law, military science, oratory, and politics" (Mason 167).

> Sex are principally chargeable: We are apt to be misled by Appearances, to be govern'd by Fancy, and the impetuous Sallies of a sprightly Imagination, and we find it too laborious to fix them; we are too easily impos'd on, too credulous (348).

As for Romances, which have a bad moral reputation, there is no time for reading them. They are associated with female weaknesses that Chudleigh wants her readers to avoid. They "serve only to stuff the Memory, to fill it with extravagant Fancies, with false Notions of Love and Honour, to excite the Passions, soften and emasculate the Soul, and render it at once both vain and effeminate" (259). Here her vocabulary is heavily gendered: she wants to harden the woman's soul, to make it more masculine.

In many parts of the essays Chudleigh describes the common failures in female behaviour which stem from a too feminine education --feminine in the sense of weak and limited, which it commonly was. Women waste time at "the *Glass* and the *Table*, the *Park* and the *Playhouse*, unnecessary *Visits* and expensive *Games*" she writes (261). But she quickly covers herself by saying "I would not have it thought I am an Enemy to any of those things; no, 'tis their Abuse only I wou'd prevent" (261). It is an important distinction for Chudleigh to make: the behavior itself is not evil, but the attitude it is done with could have bad effects on a woman's soul and waste her time. These social activities can be done "without an unbecoming Application of Mind" (261). She warns against an attitude more than an action; for example, play at Cards can excite avarice and passion, especially in "Persons that are not govern'd by their Reason" (261). In contrast, the simple, superficial logic often found in conduct books like *The Ladies Calling* tells women that certain behavior should be avoided because it does not appear good to other people or to God. This intermittent superficiality is caused by Allestree's moral emphasis on external conduct, while Chudleigh emphasizes internal attitude. For example, Allestree praises at length one of the outward manifestations of modesty, the blush, for "there is nothing gives a greater lustre to a Feminine Beauty" (6). He also says the angry speech of a woman is like "The barking of a dog" -- women "should consider how odious it makes them, how unfit (yea intolerable) for humane society" (*The Ladies Calling* 48-9).

However, to be fair to Mr. Allestree, he does not always motivate by threatening social disapproval; he earlier warns that Anger, "whilst it deals its blows without, wounds yet more fatally within," and this consideration is more in line with Chudleigh's tone and purpose (*The Ladies Calling* 46). Most of her complaints are not connected with behavior, but with beliefs picked up during a woman's faulty or neglected education. We see this idea of gendered education in her language: she feels that excessive care for a woman's own body "betrays an unmanly Imbecility" (278). Too many people, she regrets, "especially those of my own Sex, have from their Infancy imbib'd wrong Notions of Life and Death," and fear is "generally the Effect of a too tender and effeminate Education" (278, 281). To counteract these errors in instruction, in her essays Chudleigh often takes the example of famous men, especially Socrates, to illustrate her points.

Throughout her essays Chudleigh demonstrates that women can make a practical use of their deep knowledge without being a threat to men. In order of importance, knowledge is useful for women's own inner peace, her happiness in social conversation, and to make solitude bearable and fruitful. As a rule, she discusses the benefits in this sequence, from the woman's inner activity and state to her outside behavior and circumstances. Knowledge "will make you easie with your selves, pleas'd with your own Conversation, and chearful in the most retir'd Confinement" (259). Knowledge of metaphysics and astronomy will give a woman pleasure in a mental freedom that compensates for this physical confinement. She can "contemplate the Superiour Regions, and their blest Inhabitants" and "survey all those solid Globes which swim in the fluid Aether," enjoying nature and art better for her knowledge of them (259). But, as in Astell's proposed retreat, women learn to apply their knowledge to social situations. "Astell's vision," explains Kate Lilley, "is not of a closed order, but a flexible separatist retreat, which acknowledges, and makes integral, responsibilities in the world at large" (114). While Chudleigh complained earlier of the frivolous topics women converse about, she now suggests that a woman's improved education will raise social conversation, and widen it to include participants of both sexes. Since women are "Rational Beings," she argues, since their knowledge is "so desirable, so improving, so unexpressibly delectable, why should it be conceal'd, made only the Entertainment of our Thoughts, the Companion

of our Solitary Hours? why should it not be introduc'd into general Conversation?" (260). One of the unique aspects of Chudleigh's essay on knowledge is that she does not outline the practical usefulness of the training as it relates to women's traditional roles and service to men. She does not discuss the trivial duties of women, while other writers, such as Bathsua Makin, argue that women can use their theoretical knowledge in the domestic work of their daily life.[11]

While Chudleigh's classical and Christian idea of submission to Reason or God is essentially conservative, it is more liberating than some misogynist ideas of woman's submission. In fact, Chudleigh's wide range of subject matter and her liberating idea of reason throughout her essays can be compared with the narrow focus and narrow ideas in Mr. Sprint's *The Bride-Woman's Counseller*. In her essays, ladies will "be perswaded to cultivate their Minds," a much grander project than that of obeying human authority out of fear of punishment (247). Chudleigh encourages women to look above to spiritual and mental joys, but Mr. Sprint puts all his efforts towards bending the wife's mind away from spiritual things: "'*tis a Duty incumbent on all married Women to be extraordinary* [sic] *careful to content and please their HUSBANDS*" (5). While Chudleigh encourages women to obey husbands, her instructions focus more on the motives of obedience. For her, subservience to custom, will, and the senses is slavish and beastly. Obedience of reason is obedience of God and secondly obedience of one's own mind and conscience. But Mr. Sprint only cares for outward obedience: he encourages women to obey their husbands as God, and he cares not whether they obey for the sake of fulfilling their own sensual desires, or obey for the sake of Virtue. For Mr. Sprint, a woman's duty is to ignore her own reason as well as her passions; to bring unto her husband "the very Desires of the Heart to be regulated by him so far, that it should not be lawful for her to will or desire what she her self liked, but only what her Husband should approve and allow" (6). This restriction divests a woman of mind; it makes her into "a Mirrour which hath no Image of its own" (Sprint 7). Chudleigh, on the other hand, encourages a woman's mind

[11] "Married Persons, by vertue of this Education, may be very useful to their Husbands in their Trades . . . and to their Children, by timely instructing them . . ." (Makin 27).

to reflect herself: she would persuade women "always to do such things as they may be able to reflect on with a rational Pleasure" (249).

The reign of Reason and God transcends, but does not obliterate, the social hierarchy in which women take the second place to men. In their own bosoms, women are ruled by no man's arbitrary judgments. After confirming her respect for the institution of marriage in the preface, she qualifies her respect: "I think it ought to be a Union of Minds as well as of Persons and Fortunes" (249). But if there is no intellectual basis for a marriage, it is not therefore nullified: "there is the greater Trial of Virtue, but never the less Obligation to Duty and Respect" (249). The reason for obeying an unloving husband is not for the husband's sake, but for her own and Virtue's sake.

> We ought on all Occasions to do what becomes us, to have a Regard to the Dignity of our Nature, and the Rules of right Reason; and having govern'd our selves by the Dictates of Religion and Honour, to be contented with the secret Approbation of our own Consciences (249).

Chudleigh assumes that woman's nature is dignified and reasonable, not just sensual, and that her conscience is essentially virtuous, not tainted by Eve's sin. Therefore, obedience to God and Reason is essentially obedience to the noblest principles of one's own being. The highest tribunal for judgment is the conscience, for "the ill-grounded reproaches of the talkative part of Mankind," which may include women and men, "who by their being for the generality unavoidably ignorant of our Circumstances, cannot be capacitated to become proper Judges of our Actions . . ." (249).

Astell agrees with Chudleigh about the manner of women's obedience to fathers and husbands. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Part II (1697), Mary Astell writes,

> So it cannot be thought sufficient that Women shou'd but just know whats Commanded and what Forbid, without being inform'd of the Reasons why, since this is not like to secure them in their Duty. For we find a Natural Liberty within us checks at an Injunction that has nothing but Authority to back it . . . . (177)

But Astell and Chudleigh remind readers that before women are ever required to obey their husbands, they should be allowed the freedom to choose one wisely. Chudleigh writes that in the choice of a friend or a husband, "Would we . . . never suffer our selves to be guided by Opinion, by the mistaken Sentiments of the Vulgar, . . . we should never have occasion to repent our Choice" (349).

Chudleigh realizes that much of women's sorrows in life are caused by problems in marriage and customary morality. She provides a better model for life in the utopian or prophetic parts of her *Essays*. Chudleigh's paradisal descriptions of the future, however, are not of the kind normally classified as utopias. Kate Lilley, in writing about the utopia found in Astell's proposals, finds a difference between men's and women's utopias:

> Men's utopias have focused on political systems and laws; utopian writing by women has tended to focus strategically on the possibilities and problems of gendered social life and the weight of custom -- micropolitical questions of sexuality, maternity, education, domesticity and self-government -- while declining the burden of representing a fully articulated model of a new political order. (118)

Chudleigh's utopian visions follow this non-political model; while they eventually encompass a whole society and its laws, they are described in terms of the breaking of harmful customs and the formation of strong domestic and personal bonds. In her essay "Of Riches," harmonious marriages, created because of similar temperament and values rather than similar fortune or rank, make up a large part of the pleasure in her paradise:

> We should see no more unsuitable Matches; no Force would be put to Inclinations, Virtue and Vice would not be join'd, the Meek would not then be constrain'd to sigh out their Hours with the Passionate, the Humble subjected to the insupportable Humours of the Proud, nor the Liberal chain'd to the Covetous, confin'd to their Reverse, to what is diametrically opposite to their Temper; the Golden Age would be renew'd, and we should fancy ourselves among the first happy Mortals . . . . (299-300)

This Utopian society is based on the right choices of women and their parents in self-love as well as marriage. In "Of Self-love" Chudleigh explains that the proper or improper love of the self is what makes individuals and societies happy or unhappy. Her goal is to help women "love themselves with a more rational Affection," for "the more they lov'd themselves, the more they would love others" (302-3). "The World would then be one continued Scene of Pleasure, one great Family of Love" (303). Still, good marriages seem to be the basis of her Utopian vision. The right kind of union would allow men and women the freedom to pursue knowledge and virtue without hindrance from one another. They would be charitable to the poor, and own the Riches of the Mind. Utopian ejaculations based on family and intimacy recur in her essays on self-love and justice, where the world would be "one great Family of Love" and "We shall our Souls in one combine" (303, 308). Only in one case is the Utopia based on a woman's rule over all. [12] But the attitudes of men and women prevent this golden age, for by their attention to the body and the passions, they "are accessary to their own Captivity, and do as much as in them lies to reduce their Souls to the worst Slavery" (304). Her ideal world thus begins from an ideal state of soul in individuals, then in marriages and friendships, then to the rest of society.

In her essays on friendship and love, which are a miniature version of paradise, Chudleigh makes it clear that these connections can be formed regardless of sex. Friendship is not limited to homosocial relationships, nor is love limited to marital relationships. Friendship is spoken of in terms as passionate and binding as the love that should exist in marriage:

> the more her Affection augments, and the more ardent is her Love; she then incessantly presses forward, and never rests till she becomes one with the dear Object of her Choice; one by the holiest, firmest, and most indissoluble Union; a Union not cemented by Wealth, not founded on Greatness . . . . (343)

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[12] In her essay on anger the Utopia is occurring presently under the rule of Queen Anne, who seems to her to embody the soul of the "Royal Martyr," Charles I. She is "the Glory of her Sex, the Joy of all her Subjects" (326). Anne forgives her subjects the injury against the former king, "and with a Maternal Tenderness" for her country, shines her beams of virtue over the land.

In her essay on love, while she offers several married couples as examples (listing them with the wives' names first), her strongest example is the love between two Biblical men, David and Jonathan. Regardless of conjugal or blood ties, a woman should only love or offer friendship to those of merit: "'tis Virtue alone which ought to tye the Knot," and all who are worthy ought to possess her esteem (345). If any of Mary Chudleigh's friends or loved ones fall from virtue, "they have no reason to be angry with me if I withdraw my Affection; 'tis themselves they ought to blame, I'm still the same" (347). In such a case, the fallen friend is still worthy of pity, and one should continue to be "meek, humble, patient, and forgiving" (348). *The Ladies Calling* is a little more strict on the duty to love one's husband regardless of his virtue. Allestree posits the case of a man who is jealous of his wife, and accuses her. He may be a good man, or a vicious one, but in either case, the woman must not cease from loving him: "let a woman therefore be the person suspecting or suspected, neither will absolve her from that love to her Husband she has sworn to pay" (*The Ladies Calling* 187). Chudleigh's ideas of love and friendship transcend marriage, sex, time, and the physical body, and allow the woman a separate subjective world from her husband. In her case, "the production of female subjectivity entails the dismantling of the aristocratic body,"[13] for in Chudleigh's lifetime the artistocratic woman's body was merely a site for the display of the wealth and nobility of her husband or family. Under such associations of the female body with subjection, wealth, and mental emptiness, Chudleigh surmises that the best relationships cannot be formed until we are "freed from our Bodies, from these heavy Lumps of Matter" (343).

The difficulties of personal affliction and solitude are softened by mutual friendship and education, attributes which are united in a friend and advisor like Astell. But since the friendship of equality has no gender in her essays, it is also possible in marriage. She refers to the women of Sparta, who were monitors and teachers, even of their husbands:

> Each had his Lover, who was an Observer of his Actions, a faithful Monitor, an Encourager of him in Virtue and every laudable Quality, and an equal Sharer with him in his Honours and Disgraces, his Rewards and Punishments. (341)

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[13] Armstrong, p. 116.

Allestree agrees that to admonish a husband for his faults is a wife's duty and the "most genuine act of friendship" (189). The Spartan women, Chudleigh notes, were also careful to instruct younger women:

> The Women took the same Care of those of their own Sex, and made it their Business to make the young Beauties, for whom they had a Kindness, as good, as ingenious, and as judicious as they were capable of being. (341)

The author says she wishes for a friend who is "capable of advising me, of assisting me in the Conduct of my Life, of telling me what to chuse, and what to avoid" (350). In her final work Mary Chudleigh presents herself as "capable of advising"; her criticism and advice is thus evidence of her own friendship and zeal for other women (and any male readers).

If friendship and love are not limited by sex, neither are other vices and virtues. *The Ladies Calling* and other handbooks of conduct and piety addressed to women often claim that certain virtues are becoming to one sex and not to another. For example, humility is traditionally a woman's virtue and courage a man's virtue. But Chudleigh refuses to claim certain virtues or vices as the province of one or the other sex. Humility is in Chudleigh's essays a virtue of both sexes: "Of all the Virtues which adorn the humane Nature, there is none more amiable than *Humility* . . ." (268). She personifies Humility as a female -- a woman who, like Chudleigh, must live in retirement although she is a good teacher:

> *Humility* is a solitary Virtue, few desire her Society . . . They praise her because they think it decent to do so, because 'tis for their Reputation; but they keep her at a Distance, . . . will not treat her as a Friend, lest she should . . . presume to unmask them, and by discovering them to themselves, rob them of the Satisfaction of fancying they have some Pretence for their Pride. (272)

But right after this feminine portrait of humility, Chudleigh balances it with the example of Socrates as a humble person. He takes on the traits assigned to Humility: he experiences the "Persecution of his ungrateful Countrymen" because he "pull'd his *Athenians* out of

their belov'd *Asylum*, [and] endeavour'd to convince them of their Ignorance, to perswade them they were not the Persons they took themselves to be . . ." (272). Even in Socrates' death, and Humility's banishment, there is strength and triumph. When one is prepared to meet resistance and anger, humility is a means of gaining power. Chudleigh's prayer for humility expresses the idea that if she is not humble, "my Satisfaction will not be my own, but in the Power of every envious Wretch, of every base Detractor" (273). Repeatedly Chudleigh tries to take the attention away from gendered ideas of virtue.

Although her declared audience is female, Chudleigh does not prescribe submission to men or human authority -- she wants to foster women who are "ever ready to submit to the Decision of Reason" (269). In "Of Humility" she distinguishes servility from a truthful estimate of the self; humility is the beginning of a long and gradual climb to the level of wisdom where one has earned the right to teach. "The humble Mind is still improving;" it is not kept in subjection (269). In an essay on such a sobering subject, there is a surprising amount of joyful, free images. She contrasts the flight of Icarus with the humble patience of other learners, who, "with a prudent Care,

> By small Essays for Flight prepare;
> Who raise themselves by slow Degrees,
> First only perch upon the Trees . . . (270).

This slow labour eventually allows the student to "roam at large in Fields of Light, / And safely leave both Earth and Night" (270). In the metaphor of flight, the transformation is not from feminine to masculine, oppressed to oppressor, or from lower social station to a higher, but rather from a wingless creature to one with natural, not engineered, wings. In her essay on grief, she describes her own ascent out of despair as one of gradual steps, small victories. Her method of quelling negative thoughts and fruitless desires is "highly advantageous; the more I made use of it, the more Ground I got; every Step was an Advance, a pressing nearer to that Tranquillity of Mind at which I aim'd" (295). These narratives of slow ascent imply a humble yet progressive education under the principles of reason, not a stationary state of meekness before men or society.

By degrees Mary Chudleigh seems to have found her natural wings as an essayist. In her essay on Pride, she takes up the example of Socrates once again for her own model - a teacher who had "a lowly Mind" (273). In her earlier prefaces Chudleigh often characterizes herself as a student or apprentice, but in her essays, she speaks as if she has graduated. Mary Astell inspired her immensely, but she long felt inferior to other women authors, as she shows by her exclusion of more accomplished women from the audience of *The Ladies Defense*. There are clues in the very titles of her essays which point to the process of transformation from apprentice-writer to seasoned sage. "Of Humility" reveals a struggle with the desire for fame and love based on one's accomplishments and knowledge; she accepts and transforms a negative virtue into an active virtue. "Of Self-Love" is a further working out of this struggle, and a redefinition of self-respect which fosters creativity rather than indolent pride or timidity. "Of Calumny" admits a fear of the judgments of authority figures and an angry rejection of them, and "Of Solitude" presents creative withdrawal as a solution. Mary Chudleigh is an excessively ambitious writer and student. She glories in knowledge, and ever searches for more complete understanding. She refuses to be limited and labeled by her gender or her lonely lifestyle, but often succumbs to despair. Constantly yearning for a greater freedom of spirit, she gradually mounts toward the place of authority and ability from which she will be able to help other women.

The few autobiographical parts of the *Essays* give us hints to the process Chudleigh underwent to become the moralist and essayist. They also act as powerfully didactic narratives. She allows herself the freedom to boast of her successes and share her struggles. In her essay on fear, she boasts and then admits where her weakness lies: "I could, without a Murmur, relinquish my Right to every thing besides my Friends and Books; they are the whole I value, to me the Joys of Life" (285). She has willingly cut off everything but her friends and her studies as sources of joy -- they are her last support. But such a focussed, extreme pleasure comes at a terrible cost. In her piece on grief, she confesses she went through difficulty with the death of her child and her mother. But before she endures this suffering there was an earlier one to overcome -- depression. It is caused by some family trouble:

> At first I repin'd at my Fate, thought myself hardly dealt with, could not forbear finding fault with the unequal Distributions of Providence, the Unkindness of Relations, and the too little Regard they often have for the Happiness of such as it becomes them to be tenderly concern'd for: and when I found my self dispirited, and sinking under the Pressure, good God! . . . How amiable did Death appear to me! (294)

Chudleigh then experiences conversion to Reason. Her tale parallels the pattern of Christian testimony, but hers is not a story of turning from sin to virtue; it is more like the mature and painful trial of the good man Job. When she is tested she already has an established relationship with God: "the awful Deference that I bore to thee calm'd all my Passions" during the test (294). God is of course instrumental in her change of attitude, which results not merely in a new understanding of the scriptures or philosophy, but a new relationship with herself. Once her reason is enlightened by God, it "made me resolve to make a narrow Scrutiny into my self," she rites (294). She takes stock of her weaknesses, her illogical desires, and decides to wage war against the parts of her self which pose danger to her peace and reason. "[A]s soon as I found any Disturbance within, any Tendency to Sorrow, Anger, Fear, or any other Disquieters of my Repose, I made a timely Resistance" (295). This painstaking habit of peacekeeping in the soul-nation is what strengthens her eventually to bear the deaths of her mother and daughter at the same time: "Had I not then been arm'd with Resolution, how wretched had I been, how much a Slave to Grief!" (295).

Mary Astell's influence on Chudleigh, or perhaps their parallel experiences with solitude, comes to light in some of the narrative sections of Astell's prose. In *Reflections Upon Marriage*, Astell writes of a situation in which a husband and wife separate, and the wife is forced to retire into the country. She describes how the wife can use her painful loneliness and turn it into a blessing:

> But a little time wears off the uneasiness, and puts her in possession of Pleasures, which till now she has unkindly been kept a stranger to. Affliction, the sincerest Friend, the frankest Monitor, the best Instructer, and indeed the only useful School

> that Women are ever put to, rouses her understanding, opens her Eyes . . . She now distinguishes between Truth and Appearances, between solid and apparent Good. (*Reflections Upon Marriage* 96)

This situation is very much like the one Chudleigh experiences. In her essay "Of Solitude," she reasons that knowledge is meant to be shared:

> 'tis not probably that Faculties so bright as ours, were given us to be conceal'd . . . . They were to be the Objects of Esteem, to attract Respect and Veneration, by which their Influence might become more prevalent, and thereby render'd capable of being universal Blessings. (385)

Therefore, those who are learned, like herself, should teach others. "But," she continues, "if it is our Fortune to live retir'd, to be shut up in a Corner of the World, and deny'd the Pleasures of Conversation, . . . we ought to become good Company to ourselves" (386). Clearly there is some resentment in the words "shut up" and "deny'd." Chudleigh had great need for the consolations of philosophy and religion, and her essays express her pain and loneliness as well as the strength of her bravery and independence.

Mary, Lady Chudleigh's essays are unique and forceful, and reveal her achievement of intellectual freedom through careful use and revision of the cultural materials she inherited. She has authorial confidence, and an admirable control of rhetoric. Her earlier poetry is evidence of her satiric strength, but her *Essays* are softened by flattering strokes for her gentlemen readers and patience with her more worldly women readers. She uses and mixes her genres freely, uniting poetry, an educational proposal, historical surveys, moral speculations, and utopian fantasies as she sees fit. Even the ideas she borrows are colored by her wit and personal flavor -- her metaphors of the mind as land or storehouse, the idea of woman as object of her own scientific inquiry, the notion that women are more religious and therefore have natural insight into truth. Her advocacy of the retired life of virtue marks her as one who refused to rebel actively or change her human context, but she did not accept the way things were as the way they should ideally be. Chudleigh's withdrawal is active and engaging, not passive and acquiescent. Her essays are consistently egalitarian: her educational project aims to make women more

masculine in their minds, the essays themselves elucidate non-gendered virtues, and she uses both male and female historical models. Most of the time her essays could easily be intended for male and female readers alike, for she refuses to instruct women in the details of proper deportment, dress, household management, or motherhood. Like her poetry, Mary Chudleigh's essays were "intellectual constructs of the one great desire of her life -- the attainment of mental, moral, and personal fulfillment" (Smith 164). She found this fulfillment through self-education, according to her essays, despite terrible personal sorrows and a society prejudiced against women. The support and influence of Mary Astell and other learned ladies, as well as her extensive reading, helped her to grow into the sage she became, and her *Essays* are left to the next generation as an invitation to follow and improve upon her attainments.

Chapter Two

Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*

Between Mary, Lady Chudleigh's *Essays* (1710) and Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) sixty-three years have passed, and Chudleigh has largely been forgotten. After a long silence in the moral writing of women, a new social atmosphere came into being in the 1740s which affected the women educational writers thereafter. Women were still educated to please men in courtship in the mid-eighteenth century, but their education included more of a moral nature. Samuel Richardson's novels and Samuel Johnson's periodical essays contributed to a change in the moral tone of society, and women were gradually allowed to be better educated . . . if they were virtuous. In the 1750s a group of elite men and women began to gather at the homes of Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Vesey for the purpose of intellectual conversation. This informal society, of which Hester Chapone was a member, was called the bluestockings.[1] The bluestocking ladies encouraged each other in literary pursuits, and by their strict standards of virtue, effectively "[broke] the taboo against learning for women" (Sylvia H. Myers, "Bluestocking" 280). In the latter half of the century, books on female education became much more popular, and more women began to publish moral works, such as didactic novels. Joyce Hemlow notes that the date 1773, in which Lord Chesterfield's (and Chapone's) letters on education and manners were published, "often taken as the culminating point in studies of courtesy literature for men, marks the beginning of an accelerated production of courtesy books for women."[2] Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) was one of the standard ladies' conduct-books, along

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[1] Originally the term "bluestocking" referred to one of their members, Benjamin Stillingfleet. According to Sylvia H. Myers, "then they used the term both for men with intellectual interests and for the idea that women needed intellectual interests. . . . It was critics of the female bluestockings who limited the term to women" ("Bluestocking" 280).

[2] (Joyce Hemlow, "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books," PMLA 65 (1950), p. 732, as quoted in Leranbaum 291).

with James Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Ladies* (1766), and Dr. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774).

Hester Mulso Chapone (1727-1801), known as "The admirable Mrs. Chapone," or "Hecky,"[3] was a well-known bluestocking. She was born Hester Mulso in Twywell, Northamptonshire, and was the only child of her mother's to survive to adulthood. In her youth, her mother, known for beauty and wit, discouraged her daughter's education out of jealousy.[4] After her mother's early death Miss Mulso taught herself languages, music, drawing, and managed her father's household. In her twenties she met Elizabeth Carter, who was famous for her translation of Epictetus; they remained close friends until death. Carter introduced her to the bluestocking hostess Mrs. Montagu, to whom the *Letters* are dedicated. As a young woman Mulso also associated with the novelist Samuel Richardson, with whom she debated the limits of filial (but not marital) obedience.[5] Richardson introduced her to her husband, John Chapone. The Chapones married in 1760; but John died ten months later in 1761. Chapone and her friend Elizabeth Carter were friends and admirers of Samuel Johnson. Hester Chapone was not shy about expressing her opinions of Johnson's work, however: she called Johnson's *Rasselas* an "ill-contrived, unfinished, unnatural, and uninstructive tale," and "disputed with Johnson on Human Malignity" (*Conversations* 51). Virtue and knowledge seem to have been her strongest claims to male attention, for Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall writes in his memoirs that "under one of the most repulsive exteriors that any woman ever possessed she concealed very superior attainments and extensive knowledge" (*Conversations* 51). Her works include *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1775), including three new essays and "The Story of Fidelia" (which originally appeared in the *Adventurer* in 1751), and *A letter to a New-married Lady* (1777).

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[3] A nickname among her Bluestocking friends (*Conversations* 51).

[4] "At the age of nine, [Miss Mulso] worte a short romance, 'The Loves of Amoret and Melissa,' which aroused the jealousy of her mother, who suppressed any other immediate literary efforts" (Todd 81).

[5] One of the few drawings of her likeness, by Susanna Highmore, shows her as one of a group of friends gathered to listen to Richardson read from his works. According to Dr. Johnson, Chapone fell from Richardson's favour partly because she had her poems read publicly.

Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* was received by her own generation with extreme enthusiasm. In 1778 when she was residing with her uncle, the Bishop of Winchester, the Queen praised Chapone for her *Letters* during a visit; the Princess read them as part of her education. Horace Walpole said her *Letters* "were likely to make the Bible fashionable" (*Conversations* 51). Some of the sentiments from her *Letters* were later included in Mary Wollstonecraft's anthology of reading recommended for women (*The Female Reader*, 1789).[6] According to the biographer Mrs. Elwood in 1843, Chapone's *Letters* "still remains a standard work upon female education, and which, perhaps, as a whole, has never yet been surpassed" (196). "By its final appearance in 1851," alleges Linda M. Troost, "it had been through about sixty editions in Great Britain, France, and the United States" (*British Women Writers* 138). However, since Chapone sold her manuscript to the bookseller, she earned little from its sale.

In our century Chapone's famous *Letters* are considered to be extremely superficial and unoriginal. Miriam Leranbaum writes, "As one might infer from its popularity, the work is an attractively and sensibly written compendium of the conventional ideals of the age, and rarely displays much individuality" (292). Chapone's work is, for the most part, a compendium of maxims and ideas about female conduct found in other educational works of the century. But because the eighteenth century is an age in which unusual opinions, along with singularity of dress and enthusiastic religion, were ridiculed, we should modify our ideas of what constitutes individuality, and when it is practical to display it. Obviously what we value as originality and independence in authors was not as important then; the cult of self was not very advanced. To some extent each of the three women moralists I am studying has recycled genres and opinions; so have the male moralists of their time. However, Chapone's moderate degree of originality, which resulted from her feminine perspective on moral issues, will appear during a more detailed comparison of her text with those she draws on.

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[6] Four of Chapone's observations on female character are found in Wollstonecraft's prefatory "Select Desultory Thoughts: addressed to females" (Sig. A5). Under the section, "Didactic and Moral Pieces," Wollstonecraft includes part of Chapone's discussion of temper (80-1), and false sensibility (86-8); later she records Chapone's thoughts on the government of servants (368-69).

Leranbaum also reveals an impatience with Chapone's lack of intellectual strength despite her title: "this book is really a series of letters on the improvement of the heart and soul, rather than the mind" (291). This charge of intellectual superficiality is not as easy to answer as the preceding charge of unoriginality. Truly, Chapone attempts to improve women's self-esteem through education, yet she falls short of Chudleigh. "Reason" itself has a different meaning in *Letters* than it does in Chudleigh's text. Chudleigh tells women to exercise reason: to read and think and judge using rigorous logic while attempting to eliminate or reform the biases of their culture. Chapone, however, advises women to be reasonable, in the sense of submitting to authoritative reason, and being practical. Chapone molds her readers from the outside in, rather than the inside out. First she looks at what is required of women by religion and society, and then shows the woman how to mold her mind to these conditions. Although a woman may feel happy and receive the praise of others for her social virtues, by this method she has been entirely consumed by her culture -- her will also. Because of the necessity of molding oneself, inside and out, to an ideal, Chapone tries to purify this ideal woman of several humiliating connotations, such as triviality, weakness, passivity, and servility. But her reclamation of the image is merely cosmetic, because her deep need to be accepted in society contradicts these gestures of independence.

However, I intend neither to damn nor eulogise Chapone in this chapter, but to be sensitive both to her contemporary context and a modern feminist viewpoint, and thus analyze more justly her shortcomings and her courage. Her struggles as an author exemplify some of the moral problems which faced her female peers. Chapone lived in an age of delicate refinement of sentiments, an age which seduced women to find virtue by an easy road, through a seemingly woman-friendly culture, not by withdrawal or difference. It was therefore difficult for Chapone to define female virtue in other terms: there was no such thing as an unsociable, unamiable virtue. Future women authors like Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen were able, through their own use and criticism of women's conduct-book morality, to articulate more strongly some of the ideas which Chapone only timorously hints at. Chapone is the weakest of the three women moralists,

but even her half-measures for improving the education and reputation of women had a wide influence.

One reason Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* was so popular is that its author understood the ideas and tastes of her century. The *Letters* owe a great part of their structure and content to other mid-century educational texts. First of all, it pays homage in its title to Isaac Watts' popular guide to self-education, *The Improvement of the Mind* (1741). But the similarities between Watts and Chapone are few. Watts' treatise, like Chapone's, has a very religious beginning, and explicitly includes women in its audience: "every Son and Daughter of *Adam*" should be able to "understand, to judge, and to reason right about the Things of Religion"(3). Like Chapone, he connects an uncultivated mind with errors in religious belief and moral conduct. Chapone's systematic approach to reading, memory, and learning through conversation has some antecedent in Watts' treatise. However, Watts develops the pure intellect much further than Chapone, instructing the reader in logic, philosophy, literary criticism, and independent judgment. She could have thought his text too masculine or difficult for her reader. Another conduct book of the same period, Wetenhall Wilkes' *A letter of genteel and moral advice to a young lady* (1740), is, like Chapone's *Letters*, addressed to a favorite niece. Chapone mirrors his sentiments more closely, for to Wilkes, the improvement of the mind means not exercises in logic but the education of desire. Not surprisingly, Chapone is also influenced by the characters and maxims of Samuel Richardson's novels; they were put into conduct-book form in *A Collection of the Moral and instructive maxims, cautions, and reflexions contained in the histories of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison* (1755). Among the conduct books of the day, Chapone reacts to James Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Ladies* (1766). She differs from him on many points and in general tone, but follows his opinion on religion very closely. These are only a few of her possible influences. Like most authors of the century, especially in the genre of educational and conduct literature, Hester Chapone's *Letters* shows its originality in the way it reorganizes, prioritizes, and reacts to the ideas that were common in culture.

Chapone liked to contradict male moralists' opinions while ensuring she would not give offense. Among the more popular ladies' advice books of the day, sharing the

limelight with Chapone, was Dr. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters,* published shortly after Chapone's book in 1774. In dame-schools and girls' boarding schools into the nineteenth century, Dr. Gregory's text was often paired with Chapone's *Letters.*[7] Indeed, Chapone knew Dr. Gregory personally through Mrs. Montagu, and he accompanied the ladies on a tour of Scotland.[8] As a woman, and a member of the group to which Gregory prescribed, she surprisingly parades an independent (yet tactfully expressed) opinion, much as she did in her relationships with Dr. Johnson and Samuel Richardson.[9] In her *Letter to a New-Married Lady* (1777), Chapone disagrees with Dr. Gregory's advice to married women by preferring an honest display of affection to the mask of frigidity. Chapone does not always draw attention to her differences with other conduct writers, but comparisons on almost every level are helpful towards a better understanding of the encouraging aspects of *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind.*

From the very beginning of Chapone's *Letters,* we notice the differences between her and Mary Chudleigh. Chapone's text is a much more social document than Chudleigh's *Essays* in its genesis and its voice. Chudleigh is more elite and aloof: she writes for herself, for women in the upper ranks, and encourages them to find joy in studious solitude. Chapone, however, repeatedly hints at the presence of a tightly knit, happy community of female friends and family members who encourage and instruct one another in propriety and morality. According to her prefatory material, Hester Chapone's first intended audience for *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* is a fourteen-year-old niece (unnamed in the published version), Jane Mulso, daughter of her brother John.[10] Her second audience included friends such as Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, to whom the letters are dedicated, and who made corrections and suggestions. The wider public she writes for are young ladies of approximately the same age as her niece, in the middle

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[7] Chapone's *A Letter to a New-Married Lady* (1777) appeared in three editions with Gregory's *A Father's Legacy* in the nineteenth century (Todd, *Dictionary* 82).

[8] Elwood, *Memoirs,* p. 195

[9] Richardson writes to Chapone on September 24, 1754, "I love you should differ from me: you give reasons for your differing when you do, which augment my love for you, at least my admiration" (*Correspondence,* vol. 3, 213-14).

ranks.[11] Partly because her audience is much different in age and class from Mary Chudleigh's, a different scheme of education, a less complex discussion of morality, and a generally more practical and social focus characterize Chapone's advice book.

Because of her inside view of women's conduct, and the encouragement of another prominent woman, Chapone has no need to apologize for her sex and the biases it may create. A female author like Chapone has less authority than a man in other areas of life, but on the subject of the education and conduct of her own sex, Dr. Gregory admits that women are more qualified to teach. He tells his daughters, "you must expect that the advices which I shall give you will be very imperfect, as there are many nameless delicacies, in female manners, of which none but a woman can judge" (5). Chapone's dedication, like Chudleigh's, acknowledges that the book is written as part of a chain of female influence and authority. Chapone chooses to establish her public reputation not through Johnson or Richardson, but through her connection with Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, and her identity as part of her club of virtuous literary ladies. In the dedication Mrs. Montagu and her friendship easily represent the text; they perform the functions of correction and encouragement on each other which the text should perform for its readers. Montagu, whom her protégée aspires to imitate, employs her valuable hours "to the good and happiness of individuals, as well as to the delight and improvement of the public" (iv). Chapone boasts that Mrs. Montagu corrected parts of the text, making it more worthy; in the same way Chapone hopes to correct young ladies' lives. She says her reward is not fame, but the approbation of her mentor: Montagu's "partiality . . . is more flattering to the writer than any literary fame" (7). Chapone's students should enter a similar relationship with the author and their own parents, who would provide affectionate rewards for good conduct. On the basis of Chapone's demonstration of sociability and virtuous friendship between herself and Montagu, she hopes to establish her authority.

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[10] Jane Mulso eventually married Reverend Jefferey's in 1798 and died in childbirth in 1800, to the deep grief of her aunt, who survived her only one year. Jane's sister was companion to Mrs. Chapone in the last two years of her life (Elwood 196,200).

[11] I will hereafter refer to Chapone's reader in the singular, because even after her letters are published, her familiar and intimate tone seems to address each reader individually.

Her first letter, like Chudleigh's preface, attempts to excite the young reader's desire to learn. But while Chudleigh tempts women with pleasurable intellectual adventure and solitude, Chapone soothes her readers by loving, domestic language in a familiar format. In the opening sentence she assures them that "I, who love you so tenderly, cannot help fondly wishing to contribute something, if possible, to your improvement and welfare" (7). The intimacy and gentleness of her tone tells the adolescent that the writer is truly interested in her happiness as well as her dutiful behavior. And, she is not going to make instruction too difficult, for the form Chapone chose is neither a sermon nor a treatise, nor even a book of moral essays. Young women of the mid-eighteenth century would have been more likely drawn to read anything written in letters. The epistolary form is common in advice literature, and was a regular part of a young woman's family life and friendships; Richardson popularized the epistolary form in novels, so that even in leisure reading, women were used to the conventions. The *Letters* are particularly suited to a woman's pen, for it was a commonly held opinion that women were better at letter-writing than men. Chapone believes the form of letters (published or not) is useful for young women particularly, for they are a solidified form of conversation. At the reader's young age, too early advice "may make no great impression" (7). But, as a form of writing which links private with public, trivial with timeless, the letters are documents which crystallize the intimate teaching relationship between niece and aunt, extend it to the public, and add longevity to her advice: "you may possibly re-peruse [the letters] at some future period . . . and thus they may prove more effectual than the same things spoken in conversation" (7-8).

In the context of ideal relationships with Montagu and her beloved niece, Chapone makes readers feel like she writes out of an Utopian experience, and that it is entirely possible to join her by following the map of education and conduct. But she knows how to make use of fear to encourage her student to depend on her for clues. Her tone is fondly maternal but serious, and at times she threatens. She relies on the crisis of adolescence to inspire young women with heroism: "You . . . must soon act for yourself; therefore it is high time to store your mind with those principles, which must direct your conduct, and fix your character" (8). Setting the stage for the heroine, Chapone invites

her imaginatively to "Consider, that good and evil are now before you . . . . Your trial is now begun" (8). Wetenhall Wilkes' conduct book uses similar language: "you are now (and not till now) entering upon the Stage of Trial. This is the Time for you to prove yourself. -- This is the Season for you to purchase Happiness" (10). Once Chapone has her reader frightened enough to be "thankful to every kind hand that is held out, to set you forward in your journey," she attempts to remove fear as a motivation:

> do not, my dearest niece, aim only at escaping the dreadful doom of the wicked; -- let your desires take a nobler flight, and aspire after those transcendent honours, and that brighter crown of glory, which await those who have excelled in virtue . . .(9)

Instead of a negative virtue of avoiding and escaping evil, Chapone offers an active, desiring virtue to women. She allows them to direct themselves higher than merely pleasing self, or even people she loves: it is an "animating thought, that every secret effort to gain his favour is noted by your all-seeing Judge, and that he will, with infinite goodness, proportion your reward to your labours" (9). Fear of censure and eternal doom, apparently, encourages mediocrity and hypocrisy, but an earnest desire to please out of love, when one is confident of reward, lifts one above the common level to be a moral hero.

Fear, however, has often been used to persuade women toward proper conduct. In conduct books, often the frailty of Eve in themselves is the danger women must fear, and the crisis is most heated when it deals with sexuality. James Fordyce tends to frighten women with the spectre of the rake: men are not to be trusted, and the only refuge is in religion. He writes, "You, my female friends, are naturally fearful. . . . Feeling yourselves, and knowing your sex to be helpless, you flee to men for safety. But do you always find it in them?" (248). William Kenrick's *The Whole Duty of Woman* (1753) preaches the following warning:

> Art thou chaste, boast not therefore; the security of thy possession, is as brittle as glass, that may by accident fall and be broken. Be on thy guard, for thou knowest not the weakness of thy nature, nor the power of temptation. By avoiding

> temptation thou mayst preserve thy chastity; but man is the serpent of deceit, and woman is the daughter of Eve. (39, 41)

Kenrick does not allow women even the power of active choice; they are constantly to defend themselves, to be afraid of themselves, men, and unknown circumstances which may cause their fragile glass vessels to "fall and be broken." Although Chapone uses fear as a device in her first letter, she does not play on the sexual frailty, or even the sexual difference, of women. The reader's crisis arises because of a crucial period between youth and adulthood, not because of sexual weakness. Chapone empowers women by giving them the faculty of moral choice. They are inspired to continual action in self-transformation, and this energy is expressed in her metaphors as well. Instead of Kenrick's rigid, frail metaphor of woman's virgin state as a glass vessel -- passively kept, and if ruined once, ruined forever -- Chapone uses a non-gendered agricultural (and Biblical) metaphor, which allows for change and improvement at any stage of life:

> Human nature is ever liable to corruption, and has in it the seeds of every vice, as well as of every virtue; and, the first will be continually shooting forth and growing up, if not carefully watched and rooted out as fast as they appear. (53)

Nevertheless, fear is an important motivation in the *Letters*, and the question is whether Chapone believes women can overcome it. Chudleigh asserts that "Virtue and Cowardice are incompatible" (*Essays* 284). But in Chapone's quotation above, a woman is continually watching herself, rooting out vice, and while it is a metaphor of activity, it implies perpetual anxiety as well. Chudleigh also believes in rigorous self-examination, but she has no fear of foreign attack. The virtuous person "carries all his Treasure within himself; 'tis securely lodg'd within his own Breast; he has nothing that another can take from him . . . nothing to lose, has nothing to fear, nothing to shake him" (284). Chapone has found from experience and observation that "women are more fearful than men" (46). The context of this statement is important: she says it as part of a discussion of the tendency of men's pride and women's vanity. While men are often too proud because they have no fear (they have too much power to be afraid), she argues that the fear of men's disapproval is a snare to women which makes them vain. Women are afraid of

being neglected or scorned by men. As an antidote, Chapone says that women should seek God's approval first: "If [God's] approbation and favour be not our principal object, we shall certainly take up with the applause of men, and make that the ruling motive of our conduct" (47). Judith Hawley honours Chapone for her attempt to lift women out of the fear of men's disapproval:

> The male writers of conduct books assumed that woman's chief role was to please man; women writers, such as Hester Chapone in *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* . . . set higher standards for women to aim for. (xviii)

Certainly, to Fordyce, as to Dr. Gregory, the end of women's creation and education is to please men: "What honour can be enjoyed by your sex, equal to that of showing yourselves every way worthy of a virtuous tenderness from ours?" (Fordyce 27). Chapone never expressly endows the male sex with the divine function of arbiter and rewarder of female morals. Therefore the religious emphasis in Chapone's *Letters* is part of a feminist's, as well as a moralist's, gesture to improve women's reputation, and purify the motives for women's good behaviour.

But does Chapone really eliminate the fear of men in women's hearts by this method? She argues that women should not be proud of physical beauty and dress, things that appeal to men's sensual nature. They should improve their minds and hearts, and thus please God. Chapone, like Chudleigh, wishes to lift women's minds beyond their bodies and clothing and sexual passions. She offers women a more noble alternative. Yet by renouncing vanity they will not please God *alone* -- they run no risk, and will not necessarily court censure. Chapone fails to mention that women's religious, moral, and reasonable behavior can also be directed at pleasing society in general, whose moral leaders happen to be men. Vanity of dress and beauty can be motivated by women's desire for sexual attention, but virtue and piety can also be motivated by a desire for moral approval.

Other conduct books encourage women to be religious and moral for the purpose of finding and keeping a husband. It is pleasing to men, they argue, because it is part of

woman's nature to be religious. Dr. Gregory follows in the footsteps of Richard Allestree's *The Ladies Calling* when he writes,

> Though the duties of religion, strictly speaking, are equally binding on both sexes, yet certain differences in their natural character and education, render some vices in your sex particularly odious. . . . The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions . . . along with the natural warmth of your imagination, renders you peculiarly susceptible of the feelings of devotion. (*Father's Legacy* 9-10)

Here atheism is a masculine vice, too "odious" for women, and religion is boiled down to "feelings of devotion." He also reduces religion to its gender-specific usefulness, such as consoling women in domestic misfortunes, or even its use in winning a husband. He tells his daughters,

> Even these men who are themselves unbelievers, dislike infidelity in you. Every man who knows human nature, connects a religious taste in your sex with softness and sensibility of heart. . . . Besides, men consider your religion as one of their principal securities for that female virtue in which they are most interested. (22-23)

Chapone would not deny that religion makes women (and men) virtuous. For her "the only sure foundation of human virtue is religion," not just the foundation of a woman's virtue (10). The benefits of religion are applicable to all, but the issue of pleasing men is merely buried within the religious duty of pleasing society:

> In proportion as you improve in true piety, you will become dear and amiable to your fellow creatures; contented and peaceful in yourself; and qualified to enjoy the best blessings of this life, as well as to inherit the glorious promise of immortality. (14)

Chapone does not make religion and virtue perform the service of pleasing men alone, but still lets gendered standards of women's behavior continue as the means of pleasing society in general. Her version of piety does not make women independent of the desire to please and conform, for "the cultivation of an amiable disposition is a great part of your religious duty" (77).

As another effort towards dissociating gender from moral and religious issues, Chapone avoids Gregory's assumption that women are naturally religious. She believes that they must be educated in piety. There are many mistakes that even women make in their conception of the deity, and she lists several of them. Apparently women can be so lacking in devotion as to pray and give thanks "with cold indifference, melancholy, dejection, or secret horror!" (12). On the other extreme, some women

> think to gain the favour of God by senseless enthusiasm and frantic raptures, more like the wild excesses of the most depraved human love, than that reasonable adoration, that holy reverential love, which is due to the pure and holy Father of the universe. (11)

Of course, Chapone truly wishes her young reader to "feel the pleasures of real piety," and Gregory understands how important a consolation religion can be in a woman's life (11). But does she go beyond Gregory at all? Is Chapone's recommended piety truly ennobling to women, or does it leave them bound in servility and mental inactivity? Gregory and Chapone, while they differ in their conception of uneducated female nature, agree in their goal of making women as religious and proper as they ideally should be. Although she uses the words "reasonable adoration," she agrees with Gregory in considering religion "rather a matter of sentiment than reasoning" (Gregory 13). Both of Chapone's illustrations of mistaken extremes of devotion (quoted above) relate to the degree and quality of women's affection for God, not their mental conception of him derived from reading and theological reflection. Women are not urged to reason about God, but to be reasonable, moderate, and acceptable in their beliefs, to "form such a notion of the Deity as is agreeable to truth, and consistent with those infinite perfections, which all profess to ascribe to him" (10). The woman must form her beliefs according to the pattern prescribed; the only mental activity involved is that of copying and conforming. The attributes and personality of the fatherly God are more essential to her than a thorough comprehension of the trinity, or even of the doctrines of salvation.

Chapone's proposed system of religious education follows the same pattern of sentimentality and superficiality. Little exercise of the mind is required in her abridged

version of the Bible, besides that of memory and patience with the more boring parts. Her guide to reading the Old Testament holds forth a chronological understanding of its narratives as one of the prime goals of the study. It is a document to be consumed and enjoyed, in a selective and orderly manner. The non-narrative books and chapters, such as Leviticus and half of Numbers, are not important. Job and the Psalms, on the other hand, are to be admired for their poetry and devotional sentiments; yet the deep metaphors of the Song of Solomon and the prophecies are supposedly beyond the niece's understanding. Although it is a Bible guide for female readers, Chapone surprisingly omits any reference to exemplary women, or even to Eve. Thus far, all is sedate, but when Chapone considers the New Testament, she becomes intensely excited. As she instructs her student how her emotions (and, secondarily, moral resolutions) should be inflamed while reading, her prose borders on enthusiasm. She can wholeheartedly and freely devote herself to God and be certain of reward: "The crown of all our joys will be to know that we are secure of possessing them forever -- without end! -- What a transporting idea!" (37). Chapone is truly benevolent in her earnest wish that her reader would share these joys, yet she believes that to attain them, less intellectual rigor is required than moral strength and devotional feeling. When she arrives at the more complex doctrinal issues of Paul's epistles, she easily admits her incapacity, and thus the unimportance of comprehending or expressing them well: "most of them [are] too intricate for your understanding at present, and many of them beyond my abilities to state clearly" (41). Chapone reveals a moral weakness as well as an intellectual one here. She recommends St. James' practical advice over St. Paul's more sublime, liberating doctrine because her notion of God is one who rewards good works (amiable external behavior). "St.Paul's writings," she warns her student, "have been fatally perverted to the encouragement of a dependance on faith alone, without good works" (41). Her bias towards the other extreme -- good works instead of faith -- arises because she blends her idea of God too closely with that of a society which will not grant grace or forgiveness to imperfect women.

Perhaps unaware of its insidious effects, Chapone intimately links the way women please human authority with the way they please God, blurring the differences between

them. She wants her reader to imagine a perfect human father, and to extrapolate from that model their image of God. God is the imperious yet benevolent one "who condescends to stile himself our Father -- and, who pitieth us, as a father pitieth his own children!" (11). Therefore, women's desire to please God is to be modeled on their desire to please their fathers, whose commands, however unreasonable, are to be trusted and obeyed. Such an association between God and one's real father can be potentially destructive. Richardson's character Clarissa had a devotion to her father analogous to her devotion to God; his curse is a weight on her soul that can only be lifted and atoned for by her death, after all other attempts have been unsuccessful. Chapone could have been just as Biblical in considering a woman's relationship with God in terms of the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom, but her choice reveals a preference for the more distant, anxious relationship, one in which she is eternally the obedient or cursed daughter, not the chosen beloved.

The pleasures of piety, as enthusiastic as they are in the *Letters*, do not replace or preclude the pleasure and desire for social acceptance. She lessens the power of religious motivation when she feels need to add selfish and social considerations to morality. "Though I wish the principle of duty towards God to be your ruling motive," she tells her niece, "human nature stands in need of all possible helps" -- such as self-interest and fear of shame (78). Thus anger is to be avoided not on religious grounds, but because

> it is so injurious to society, and so odious in itself, especially in the female character, that one should think shame alone would be sufficient to preserve a young woman from giving way to it. (80)

She even stoops as low as to warn her pupil that an angry passion will mar her beauty: "an enraged woman is one of the most disgusting sights in nature" (80). Instead, a woman's behavior is imperfect without the addition of "the sincere and genuine smiles of complacency and love" (91). Religious duty is thus translated into specific works and social signals. The more specific and external her instructions become, the more they limit individuality and choice.

In the *Letters*, the realm of religion appears to be merely an extension of society. Chapone's text certainly goes "beyond conduct," but not in the same sense as Chudleigh's *Essays*. While Chudleigh encourages women to strengthen their minds so that they can discern good and evil, Chapone does not offer any kind of theory whereby the woman can judge and weigh moral precepts before accepting them as her own. As Dr. Sprint encourages wives to submit blindly to their husbands' wills, Chapone allows no way a woman can peacefully differ from her companions in her conscience. Both conscience and judgment must be controlled from outside. More specifically, the woman controls herself, conspiring with the world against her natural temperament and desires, and uses her culture's tools to remake herself. The intention of the New Testament, she explains, is "the improvement and regulation of the heart: -- not the outward actions alone, but the inward affections, which give birth to them" (43). Chapone allows no protective border between self and society, or between society and God. Early in her first letter she faces the young reader with a formidable list of italicized "musts:"

> you must *inform your understanding* what you ought to *believe*, and *do*. -- You must *correct* and *purify* your *heart*; cherish and improve all its good affections; and continually mortify and subdue those that are evil. -- You must *form* and *govern* your *temper* and *manners*, according to the laws of benevolence and justice; and qualify yourself, by all means in your power; for an *useful* and an *agreeable* member of society. (9-10)

In this command, the understanding is neither exercised nor expanded; it is a place where one collects beliefs and rules of conduct. The heart is something that is told what is good to desire, and it must obey; the temper is also imposed on from without, to submit to unexplained laws; and all means are to be used for the grand end of being useful and agreeable to others. These actions are very much unlike Chudleigh's description of the woman's self as country, in which the queen, loving and valuing her land, bends her courage and industry towards keeping peace and order within the borders by using reason, not force. Here in Chapone's text, the self is like a colony. Under the tyrannic rule of a subordinate government, the individual woman must produce goods of a certain quality to

be exported to "society." If a woman does not have an independent intellectual and religious life, this method of education may be the most controlling because it can be used to encourage a woman completely and unquestioningly to "internalize" the rules of her social world, of patriarchy. This is exactly what Jean-Jacques Rousseau aims for in his proposal to keep women confined:

> There results from this habitual restraint a tractableness which women have occasion for during their whole lives, as they constantly remain either under subjection to the men, or to the opinions of mankind; and are never permitted to set themselves above those opinions.[12]

Chapone, by her inability to rise above opinions, is a product of habitual restraint; she can offer little to her student but the pleasures of good behavior allowed to a prisoner. Even her piety is absorbed into culture. Thus a devoted woman is more than one who loves God; she loves and becomes amiable to society. Perhaps without Chapone's intention, she allows the word "devoted" to be interpreted in the Old Testament sense of the word as an object destined for appropriation or destruction by God's chosen people.[13] Thus the improvement of the mind, its religious, intellectual, and moral functions, is actually the internalization of social norms in Chapone's *Letters*. This strange conception of the improvement of the mind is also found in Wilkes' text. He uses language which seems, at first, to give intellect an independent function, worthy of being exercised for its own sake as part of self-improvement. But then he subordinates the mental function to the moral. Early in his text he says that "It is the native Right and Privilege of all Persons, to make the nicest Enquiry into every thing, before they give their Assent to it; and this alone distinguishes between Faith and blind Credulity" (11-12). But this step is overlooked completely in the following description of the improvement of the mind:

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[12] As quoted by Mary Wollstonecraft, page 83.

[13] For example, Joshua 6:21, "They devoted the city [of Jericho] to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it -- men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys." In fact, Chapone seems to encourage women to adopt the role of Rahab, the woman of Jericho who harbored Hebrew spies within the city and whose family was therefore the only one spared. Thus women are to form an allegiance with an external system of values, and allow the unclean parts of themselves to be utterly consumed.

> Now, since the Understanding has so great an Influence upon the Will, there are but two Things, necessary to preserve us in our Duty; first, an habitual Knowledge of what we ought to do, and what we ought to shun; and secondly, a sedate Conformity of our Actions to that Knowledge. This is to turn the Mind to its own Improvement, and to qualify it for the Rewards of Virtue. (155-56)

For Wilkes, thought and knowledge are bound to social and moral utility. Elsewhere he acknowledges that "as an Enlargement of the Mind, towards a true and fuller Comprehension of the intellectual World, [Metaphysics] is a pleasing and glorious Toil" (29), but he disallows this freedom for women:

> The Study of Metaphysicks . . . is too deep and laborious for your Sex to engage in, as a Science to be methodized into a System, and treated of upon Principles of Knowledge. Nor is it safe for a young Person to dive into the Mysteries of this Study. (28-29)

Wilkes and Chapone are skeptical of the Enlightenment philosophy which exalts human reason above Biblical revelation. In Chapone's estimation, revelation must supplement reason. In order to trust that the Bible is God's revelation, one needs reason, but "such enquiries would demand more study, and greater powers of reasoning, than your age admits of. It is your part therefore," she instructs her student, "till you are capable of understanding the proofs, to believe your parents and teachers, that the holy Scriptures are writings inspired by God . . ." (15). In the face of this duty, all questions are impertinent.

Yet in the realm of human morality, Chapone sees room for improvement and questioning. She is uncomfortable with some of the limits other writers have placed on women's morality. One of Chapone's most curious distinctions is between passive and active courage in men and women. Confronted with the stereotype that women are naturally fearful and timid, she prefers to link a cowardly demeanor with a faulty education and affectation:

> Let a vain young woman be told that tenderness and softness are the peculiar charms of her sex -- that even their weakness is lovely, and their fears becoming --

> and you will presently observe her grow so tender as to be ready to weep for a fly; so fearful, that she starts at a feather; and, so weak-hearted, that the smallest accident quite overpowers her. (49)[14]

Chapone calls such a woman's fears "the most abject cowardice," and says they arise from ignoring "the direction of nature" (49). She then proceeds to argue that courage is not inconsistent with female decorum. While she points out an important difference between male and female courage, she tries to avoid the imputation that women's passive courage is weaker or less important:

> The same degree of active courage is not to be expected in woman as in man, -- and, not belonging to her nature, is not agreeable to her: -- But passive courage -- patience, and fortitude under sufferings -- presence of mind, and calm resignation in danger -- are surely desirable in every rational creature . . . . (50)

A logical struggle and tension lie behind her copious use of dashes, as she attempts simultaneously to define two kinds of courage and the difference between men's and women's natures. Chapone's discomfort over the words and the issue of courage may have been fostered by James Fordyce's condescending passage on fortitude:

> As for you, my fair pupils, we, no doubt, wish you to possess such fortitude as implies resolution, wherever your virtue, duty, or reputation, is concerned. But along with that we expect to find, on other subjects, a timidity peculiar to your sex; and also a degree of complacence, yieldingness, and sweetness, beyond what we look for in men. Neither do we, so far as I know, ever rank amongst feminine qualities Valour, strictly so called. (308-9)

Chapone does not want men to "expect to find . . . timidity" in women. Nor does she think that "complacence, yieldingness, and sweetness" is programmed into women's genes; it must be fought for. If women are to suffer, Chapone encourages them to do it with grace and self-respect. Fordyce's phrase "Valour, strictly so called" is evidence that

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[14] Mary Wollstonecraft quotes this memorable passage in her *Female Reader* of 1789.

he is also struggling with the way in which the labels of virtues have become heavily gendered -- women could have valour, if it were not strictly in the male sense.

Here Chapone is trying her best to point out a similarity between male and female virtue by making courage a trait of both sexes, just as she made vanity a vice of both sexes. Even so, the effort is marginally successful, for the term "passive courage" sounds like an oxymoron. Courage implies activity. Chapone is attempting to valorize feminine virtue, but she would have been stronger and more successful if she had held, with Mary Wollstonecraft, that there is no sex to virtue. Wollstonecraft speaks on this very subject of fortitude and the fear of masculine women:

> Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life; but why should it be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries? (Wollstonecraft 11)

In Richardson's novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, even Harriet expresses herself much better than Chapone as she deduces that men's courage is "natural" because it is based on physical superiority. Harriet allows that women may "acquire" courage: "if there be two sorts of courage, an acquired and a natural; why may not the former be obtained by women, as well as by men, were they to have the same education?" (VI. xlii. 181-2). But for Chapone, passive courage has a feminine demeanour attached to it, and its expression requires specific education. Courageous women do not vocalize complaints; tears are only attractive "when they flow irresistibly, and avoid observation as much as possible . . . it attracts our sympathy, if involuntary and not designed for our notice" (51). When a woman's courage can be shown in action, by "an ardour to relieve" and "assiduity to promote the good and happiness of the persons you love," she is to act without exce words to draw attention to herself (51). Passive virtue is examined in detail in Jane Aust[illegible]'s novel *Sense and Sensibility*, in which Elinor conceals her disappointment in love

from everyone, even her sister, and forces herself to be kind to her rival, Miss Steele.[15] For Chapone and Austen, silence is often the evidence of feminine courage, of a difficult and crucial battle within the self. A woman's courage is made even more difficult because she cannot hope for any social help or reward, while male valour is obvious and promptly rewarded -- the freedom to express oneself is itself a reward. Compared with Fordyce's treatment, Chapone's tentative redefinition of courage allows women more dignity and moral responsibility, but merely puts a good face on an essentially oppressive situation.

A morally responsible woman is held accountable for her behavior in the most pleasurable aspects of life, as well as the painful. Therefore, like Mary Chudleigh, Chapone sets out to re-educate her reader of the true nature of friendship and love. Young women's "first error" in friendship, she explains,

> is that of supposing equality of age, and exact similarity of disposition indispensably requisite in friends . . . The grand cement of this kind of friendship is telling secrets, which they call confidence; and, I verily believe that the desire of having secrets to tell, has often helped to draw silly girls into very unhappy adventures. (54-5)

She has a sharp observation of fashionable young ladies' follies which is somewhat entertaining although the context is serious. The young Jane Austen's *Love and Freindship* (written in 1790) humorously and indulgently parodies many of the mistakes and adventures Chapone warns against.[16] As an alternative, the kind of friendship Chapone encourages is a serious Christian friendship that is more like mentorship. Chapone's niece is fifteen, and the ideal friend for her would be a young woman "twenty-three or twenty-four years of age" who has the desire to be the confidante and guide of her younger companion (56). Such an unequal friendship could often be distasteful, for

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[15] The narrative point of view in *Sense and Sensibility* is allied with Elinor; however, at the end of the novel, Elinor's resolution crumbles, and we are relieved by her release of emotion.

[16] Austen's parody is written as a letter, in which an aged coquette recounts her youthful adventures to her friend's daughter. The heroine, Laura, travels throughout England and Scotland. She lies, steals money, affects extreme sensibility, and encourages a young woman to elope with a fortune-hunter, but considers her behaviour unimpeachable according to the moral standards found in romances.

the younger one must often hear the unpleasant truth about herself: "A real friend will venture to displease me, rather than indulge my faulty inclinations, and thereby increase my natural frailties" (58). Used to hearing correction and reproof from parents and relatives, and even their intimate friends, women would be kept in training for the state of marriage, in which a gentle correction could no longer be depended on. This kind of friendship is similar to the mutual admonition between the characters of Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe in Richardson's novel *Clarissa* (1747-8). Clarissa is the exemplary model to Anna Howe, but Clarissa herself falls into error partly through the lack of a wiser friend to guide and advise: apparently even a mentor needs a mentor of her own. One of Chapone's mentors is Mrs. Montagu. The chain of influence extends downward as well, for Chapone hopes her niece "will be this useful and engaging friend to your younger companions" (57). Without directly saying so, Chapone is describing the relationship she hopes to have with her niece, and with each reader. The role of advisor offers women a rare taste of power and influence: in a friendship Chapone has witnessed, "the elder has received the highest gratification from the affection and docility of the younger" (57).

This friendship between elder and younger women is important and pleasurable in itself, but is implicitly a kind of preparation for the union between unequals that occurs in marriage, which Chapone calls "The highest kind of friendship," that is, in its perfection (63). Most of the instructions given for forming and sustaining friendships can be applied to marriage, such as the warning against showing signs of jealousy. While Chapone allows her pupil a little freedom of choice in friendship, she does not allow as much freedom in the choice of a husband. At the time, parental authority over a daughter's marriage was a subject much debated in society as a whole, not only between Chapone and Richardson. Chapone's limitations focus on the issues of age, inexperience, and gender: "young women know so little of the world, especially of the other sex, and such pains are usually taken to deceive them, that they are every way unqualified to choose for themselves, upon their own judgment" (73). Young women can be influenced by "romantic notions" and, if they indulge themselves, may marry a man "upon a mere personal liking, without the requisite foundation of esteem," which will produce "misery and shame" (74). The seriousness and

delicacy of the advice reflects the fact that women were at a disadvantage when it came to choosing a husband, and youth only compounds the difficulty of the choice.

According to Katharine M. Rogers, "Chapone evades the consequences of her traditional principles by assuming that a generous man -- and a sensible woman would marry no other -- would not think of exerting the control to which he was legally entitled" (17). This idea is actually expressed in Chapone's *A Letter to a New-married Lady* (1777), a companion piece to the *Letters*. There she instructs a woman to do all in her power to keep her husband's affections, as if his anger or neglect were awaiting the wife's first misstep. Yet Chapone is an optimist. She assures her "that a man of Mr. B's generosity would be much mortified and distressed to find himself obliged to exert his authority in restraining your pleasures" (7). At one point she discusses how to survive the "heaviest of calamities" -- her husband's unfaithfulness -- but cuts the discussion short because she prefers not to fill her reader with apprehension (25). In the *Letters*, she follows a similar path by not worrying her niece with issues that are out of her control, such as her parents' and future husband's motives and character. She encourages her reader to trust her parents' recommendation by describing the principles by which, ideally, they will choose a husband for her:

> . . . those matches are almost always the happiest which are made on rational grounds -- on suitableness of character, degree and fortune -- on mutual esteem, and the prospect of a real and permanent friendship . . . (74)

In her novels, Jane Austen's heroines are less dependent on their parents' suggestions: they learn to follow these rational guidelines themselves while choosing a husband, and earn a parental blessing on their choice. The "consequences of [Chapone's] traditional principles" which Rogers questions are less promising of happiness than Austen's, but are not therefore certain to cause misery. Chapone is aware that not all men make good husbands, but encourages her niece to trust in the wise choice of her parents, for the likelihood of finding a good one is better when one relies on experienced judgment. Still, she allows daughters to say no: "Far be it from me, to advise you to marry where you do not love; -- a mercenary marriage is a detestable prostitution" (74).

Chapone displays her liberality on this point by praising the choice of a single life. Although she honours marriage, she refuses to exalt wifehood as the only vocation her student can aspire to:

> But if this happy lot should be denied you, do not be afraid of a single life. -- A worthy woman is never destitute of friends . . . she must be honoured by all persons of sense and virtue, for preferring the single state to an union unworthy of her. -- The calamities of an unhappy marriage are so much greater than can befal a single person. (76)

This liberal attitude, also found in Fordyce's *Sermons*, solves several contradictions found in other conduct books. Young women were expected to marry without being motivated by sexual desire. But older unmarried women were often pictured as being bitter and envious of other (married) women and extravagantly desirous of men:

> Grey hairs are uncomely to the virgin, the antient maiden is a byword with her sisters, and is accounted ill-condition'd among women. Doth she strive to hide her years, doth she assume the gaiety of her youth; her celibacy will not appear the effect of choice, but of necessity. Reject not the ordinance of marriage, nor put the day afar off, when it promises thee happiness. (*The Whole Duty of Woman* 66-67)

This is clearly contradictory advice, which serves a social purpose of reducing women's freedom to choose a husband. Chapone herself could favour both marriage and the mature single life because her own experience with both was very positive.

Perhaps the most restrictive letter in Chapone's series is the seventh, "On the Government of the Temper." She continues to vindicate woman's reputation by arguing that faults commonly assumed to belong to women are more often the result of lack of self-control than due to their sexual nature. Caprice, for example, "seems not to be connected with, or arising from our animal frame, but to be rather the fruit of our own self-indulgence" (89). By removing prejudices about women's nature, Chapone adds weight to their moral responsibility. They can no longer hide behind any physical excuse for the weakness of a bad temper. At the beginning of the letter, Chapone makes it clear

that "every human creature," not just women, has some kind of character flaw (77). However, she makes this sexual distinction: "A woman, bred up in a religious manner, placed above the reach of want, and out of the way of sordid and scandalous vices, can have but few temptations to the flagrant breach of the Divine Laws" (78). Her niece is to seek out what her particular flaws in temperament are, which must be "diligently watched and kept under, through the whole course of your life" (77). She has no excuse for not living up to high expectations, for she is told "how much the happiness of a husband, children, and servants, must depend on her temper" (78).

Chapone rescues women from the feeling of being trivial, only to make them continually anxious of becoming a horribly significant failure. If women's virtues, such as courage, are just as difficult and important as men's, their vices therefore should not be minimized. Women's vices often come to light in "actions as appear trivial, when compared with murder, adultery, and theft, but which become of very great importance, by being frequently repeated, and occurring in the daily transactions of life" (78). Chapone assures women, once again, that God is watching their every move and motive with his moral microscope: an excuse of a frail nature "will not avail in our justification before Him, 'who knoweth whereof we are made,' and of what we are capable" (80). Apparently Chapone thinks it is flattering to women to think that they are completely capable of becoming chameleons: of changing their inner nature to fit into society. The domestic challenge lies in anticipating social expectations before they are expressed, but by doing so, according to Sibella in Eliza Fenwick's novel, *Secresy* (1796), a woman becomes "a being superior to [a brute] only in a little craft" (156). If a woman does not make a distinction between true virtue and merely pleasing the authorities, she may easily become by this method "a timid, docile slave, whose thoughts, will, passions, wishes, should have no standard of their own, but rise, change or die as the will of a master should require!" (*Secresy* 156).

According to this regulatory ideal, a woman must do to her natural desires and temper what a corset does to her body. As the reason for wearing a corset is to conform the bodily shape to fashionable dress, the reason for regulating the temper is to contain one's behavior within the borders of social amiability. A woman imprisons her body in the

whalebone-bars of a corset, and she imprisons her soul under the strict surveillance of God, society, and her own moral sense. The connection between moral rectitude and tight clothing was not missed by Reverend Wilkes:

> Never appear in Company, without your Stays. Make it your general Rule, to lace in the Morning, before you leave your Chamber. The Neglect of this, is liable to the censure of Indolence, Supineness of Thought, Sluttishness -- and very often worse.
>
> *The Negligence of loose Attire*
> *May oft' invite to loose Desire.* (188)

Within this restrictive context, Chapone's gestures of revision and accommodation -- exalting women's fortitude, for example -- are admirable. As Judith Hawley says in her introduction to Jane Collier's *Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, "When you are wearing a straight-jacket, small movements can be as rebellious as sweeping gestures" (xv).

In her letter on the regulation of the temper, social and family pressures motivate behavior far more than the fear of God. Complete happiness becomes contingent upon pleasing others:

> We all, from social or self-love, earnestly desire the esteem and affection of our fellow creatures . . . the wretch, who has forfeited them, must feel himself desolate and undone, deprived of all the best enjoyments and comforts the world can afford, and given up to his inward misery, unpitied and scorned. (79)

According to the doctrine of enlightened self-interest, social love and "self-love" are ideally united. This is the source of the extreme pleasure and pain associated with the doctrine of works. A woman's worst enemies, according to the author, are her socially unacceptable, yet natural, desires. She traces every vice attributed to women to a failure in self-regulation. Unamiable behavior can at any time be attributed to too much freedom within: "When instead of regulating our actions by reason and principle, we suffer ourselves to be guided by every slight and momentary impulse of inclination, we shall, doubtless, appear . . . variable and inconstant" (89).

In the *Letters*, the conditions of social pressure, because they are the conditions which impose virtuous behavior, become associated with virtue itself. Any freedom or lack of social pressure paradoxically becomes an evil to be avoided. Women's caprice is caused by "power and flattery" within the family (90). Thus she wishes her reader to be ruled by her husband as she was by her parents: "May my dear child never meet with the temptation of that excessive and ill-judged indulgence from a husband, which she has happily escaped from her parents" (90). Chapone sees a perversity in human nature: selfish behavior is the result of too much freedom, while virtuous behavior is the result of being limited in choice, as a child is. Apparently excessive freedom of will "seldom fails to reduce a woman to the miserable condition of an humored child, always unhappy from having nobody's will to study but its own" (90). It is the proper and continual exercise of a woman's mind to regard "the choice and inclinations of others," especially of a husband or parents (90). This idea has its source in Richardson's *Clarissa*, in which Miss Howe writes, "Women . . . are mere babies in matrimony; perverse fools, when too much indulged and humour'd; creeping slaves, when treated with harshness" (*Maxims* 189). But of course Richardson himself does not always agree with the rakish Miss Howe's ideas. On this issue Chapone sounds very much like Rousseau:

> [women] must be subject, all their lives, to the most constant and severe restraint, which is that of decorum: it is, therefore, necessary to accustom them early to such confinement, that it may not afterwards cost them too dear; and the suppression of their caprices, that they may the more readily submit to the will of others. . . . (as quoted in Wollstonecraft 82)

Without their moral corsets it seems to Chapone that women cannot hope to remain stable and virtuous. This is an unhealthy association between oppressive limits and virtue.

Another area of life in which the virtues of self-denial can play a great part is that of household economy. Economy is a very middle-class, heavily emphasized aspect of Chapone's work. She says it "ought to have the precedence of all other accomplishments, and take its rank next to the first duties of life" (93). Instead of just the moral pressures of the social world, there are class pressures to be faced. The borders of class behavior must

constantly be kept in mind: "To go beyond your sphere, either in dress, or in the appearance of your table, indicates a greater fault in your character than to be too much within it" (98). To the evils of bad economy are added the more formidable possibility of offending a husband. Poor economic skills are a fault through which a woman may lose her husband's favour early and irretrievably: "the husband's opinion of his wife's incapacity may be fixed too strongly to suffer him ever to think justly of her gradual improvements" (94). This is one of the few times Chapone hypothesizes a husband's injustice, but he does not incur blame; rather, the young woman and her education are blamed for giving him the wrong impression. She also observes that such a wife may encounter difficulty in economy, for "many men do not choose even to acquaint her with the real state of their affairs" (96). But as before, the more difficult the situation, the more productive of opportunities for passive courage.[17] In such a case, it is truly not the wife's fault if mistakes are made, but still Chapone gives women reason to look within and fear: "I think it a very ill sign, for one or both the parties, where there is such a want of openness, in what equally concerns them . . . I trust you will *deserve* the confidence of your husband" (96; my italics). She believes that most husbands will reward this economic kind of passive courage: "I believe there are few men, who would not hearken to reason on their own affairs, when they saw a wife ready and desirous to give up her share of vanities and indulgences" (96). In this text, the arena of economy is the only place where a woman's self denial can be displayed. Armstrong finds this principle, by which the husband accumulates wealth and the wife regulates conduct, in most advice manuals of the time: "The domestic woman executes her role in the household by regulating her own desire. On her 'feeling and principle' depends the economic behavior that alone ensures prosperity" (120). Economy in Chapone's *Letters* is a skill that openly benefits a husband more than the wife. While the wife is struggling and denying herself for her husband's financial and professional success, her vigilance is further ensured by the fact that she is not to be motivated by her share in his success, but by the propriety of her conduct. Chapone "exalt[s] a form of labor that is no labor at all, but a form of self-regulation that

[17] This principle is repeatedly forwarded in Richardson's *Clarissa*: "ADVERSITY is your SHINING TIME." writes Anna Howe to Clarissa (letter 177, p.579).

serves as an end in itself" (Armstrong 132). Thus, even in her self-regulation and education, the woman is never allowed to enjoy the ultimate product of her perfection; it is continually rendered up as tribute.

Chapone's system of female education has been considered as among various "promising half-measures and curricula . . . [which] tended ultimately to encourage customary training." [18] Part of the fault of Hester Chapone's proposed education is that it is for young women only; therefore she does not describe the heights to which a more advanced education can reach, and limits her discussion to rudimentary knowledge. Yet even as a foundation, the education she recommends is intellectually superficial. Chapone assumes that women's mental capacities are smaller than men's. She admits that she offers only a "moderate scheme" of education, "which I think is more suited to your *sex* and age" (153, my italics).

A woman is not to be utterly passive in her own education, however limited it may be. In most of her discussion of formal studies, Chapone, herself an autodidact, recommends self-directed learning. This is the only method available for a woman who seeks to be more educated than her peers. She uses principles from Watts' treatise when she advises her reader to aid her memory by making connections between countries and a generalized idea of their importance or moral personalities. Because young boys are given more opportunity to retain things concerning the classical world through frequent repetition, a young woman must compensate by asking questions:

> never . . . lose an opportunity of inquiring the meaning of any thing you meet with in poetry, or in painting, alluding to the history of any of the heathen deities, and of obtaining from some friend an explanation of its connection with true history, or of its allegorical reference to morality or to physics. (124)

Conversation puts memory into practice, and Chapone offers herself as a conversation partner to her niece, by letter and in person. The presence of the mentor and the written outlines of the subjects to study imply that this method is not utterly self-directed. Still,

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[18] Moira Ferguson, Introduction, *The Female Reader* (1789) by Mary Wollstonecraft, p. viii.

self-education within these confines implies ability and motivation, which is a flattering implication to the woman reader.

Concerning the female accomplishments, Chapone values the moral and useful more than the aesthetic. She places the various kinds of reading above the other female accomplishments, which include dancing, languages like French and Italian, handwriting, basic arithmetic, music, and drawing. Chapone's limitations on learning the fine arts are always conditional. Depending on ability and inclination, which are assumed not to be normal assets, a woman may develop a skill for her own amusement. In music and drawing she "would only wish [one] to follow as Genius leads," because of the time they demand, and because they are not as socially important as the other accomplishments. Their usefulness, in her estimation, is mainly confined to the woman's enjoyment of solitude, "of filling up agreeably those intervals of time, which too often hang heavily on the hands of a woman, if her lot be cast in a retired situation" (118). Music and drawing are little valued because she thinks of them as selfish and unsociable skills; neither can they be used as expressions of passive courage in the trials and tribulations of her household.

Learned languages, like Latin and Greek, are not to be a normal part of a woman's studies. But Chapone confesses to her audience "I respect the abilities and application of those ladies" who know Latin or Greek (118). Therefore her student is not debarred from them if she is "strongly impelled by a particular genius" (118). Yet such a woman must be an exception in her nature and her family circumstances, for "the labour and time which [Latin and Greek] require, are generally incompatible with our natures and proper employments" (118). Mary Chudleigh agrees with Chapone that Latin and Greek are a waste of time because of the many translations available. However, Chudleigh's objection has nothing to do with women's nature or proper employments. In Chapone's opinion, the scholarly languages are the traditional territory of men's education, and therefore there is "danger" in a woman's knowledge of it, or at least the appearance of such knowledge. To study the classical languages and abstract sciences is to hazard the transgression of moral, social, and sexual norms:

> The danger of pedantry and presumption in a woman, of her exciting envy in one sex and jealousy in the other -- of her exchanging the graces of imagination for the severity and preciseness of a scholar, would be, I own, sufficient to frighten me from the ambition of seeing my girl remarkable for learning. -- Such objections are perhaps still stronger with regard to the abstruse sciences. (119)

This is not a prohibition, but a definite discouragement. Intellectual adventures are apparently not worth the sacrifices of social standing and feminine graces. In contrast, Mary Chudleigh values both intellectual and moral development and counsels her readers to ignore these dangers; she asserts that pedantry and presumption are never a problem if a woman is well aware of her own defects, that the pleasures of study outweigh the malice and envy of others, and that women need to balance their feminine imagination with a strong grounding in reason and knowledge. Chapone values fancy, religion, and morality in women's education, to the exclusion of "abstruse sciences" and ancient languages. And these are the "ideas" (sentiments, moral truths) which are worth the sacrifice of an enlarged intellect:

> Whatever tends to embellish your fancy, to enlighten your understanding, and furnish you with ideas to reflect upon when alone, or to converse upon in company, is certainly well worth your acquisition. (119)

While Chudleigh tells women to curb and train and purify their imagination (she does not exclude it), Chapone believes women should study to become more imaginative, and therefore more feminine in their minds: "The faculty, in which women usually most excel, is that of imagination -- and, when properly cultivated, it becomes the source of all that is most charming in society" (120).

Chapone comes closest to Mary Chudleigh in her transports upon natural philosophy, astronomy, and history. Chudleigh finds extreme joy in contemplating these subjects, which she considers inferior to those, like metaphysics, which "raise us above sensible Objects" (*Essays* 257). But all of these scientific pursuits are more limited in Chapone's text than in Chudleigh's. "Natural philosophy, in the largest sense of the expression, is too wide a field for you to undertake," writes Chapone (124). The study of

nature is narrowed by a woman's "powers and opportunities" (124). A woman studies nature, not by reading scientists' treatises, but by observing and contemplating it, and exercising proper feelings towards it: "endless pleasures" and "delight" are the end products of this study. So too, with astronomy. Her version of mental exercise is again very sentimental and easy: "a few books on this subject, and those of the easiest sort, with some of the common experiments, may be sufficient . . . to enlarge your mind and to excite in it the most ardent gratitude and profound adoration" (125-6). But for all this, "Moral philosophy -- as it relates to human actions -- is of still higher importance than the study of nature" (126). While the joys of natural philosophy, astronomy, and moral philosophy are also appreciated by Mary Chudleigh, to Chudleigh they are merely the recreational subjects. In the *Essays*, moral philosophy only comes after a list of more important, more rigorous intellectual subjects like logic, geometry, and physics.

Chapone considers the study of history as something challenging, but Chudleigh classifies history among the easier, more amusing parts of education like Chronology, Geography, and poetry. Chapone is safely within the limits of convention: men have allowed this study of history for women because it can develop their moral sense. But she passes the moral aspect by very quickly to focus on memorization. Genius is apparently not required. Still, she feels she must rouse her reader from mental indolence to this exercise: "perhaps you will think I propose a formidable task" (139). It may be fashionable and feminine to appear ignorant on a number of difficult subjects, such as Latin, but Chapone assures her reader,

> a woman makes a poor figure who affects, as I have heard some ladies do, to disclaim all knowledge of times and dates . . . the highest mark of folly is to be proud of such ignorance -- a resource in which some of our sex find great consolation. (139)

The horrible fate of making a poor figure in society is the result of ignorance. Yet it is not ignorance of something essential that Chapone ridicules, only the knowledge of times and dates. Once again she focuses on the superficial consideration of how this knowledge will be shown in conversation: it is a "shameful degree of ignorance, even in our sex, to be

unacquainted with the nature and revolution of [Greek and Roman] governments" (142). She entices the young woman to excel in the memory of factual details by warning her that if she does not, she will feel inferior to others in company, and will be less able to guide and direct her children. Her education (her precise factual memory) will qualify her "for the friendship and conversation of a sensible man;" and, finally -- selfish pleasures usually come last as motivations in the *Letters* -- intellectual improvement is "a pleasure, which would remain when almost every other forsakes [her]" (155).

Thus Hester Chapone is unlike Mary Chudleigh in almost every area, although they are both religious, and both aim to give women moral depth, and present and eternal happiness. They each have different strategies for dealing with the social pressures around them. Chudleigh, who finds herself surrounded by an immoral society, resists, reads, analyzes, and selectively chooses which elements of morality she is going to accept. Chapone, who is immersed in a culture which apparently honours female virtue and accomplishments, accommodates her interior to the noblest social standards she can find, those which closely match her religious sentiments. She is encouraging in her confidence that women have the intellectual and moral ability to form and train themselves and sustain complete excellence, as she defines it. She rescues women from imputations of moral weakness, but envisions fearful torments for women who deviate from purity in any part of their inner sentiments or outer behaviour: a woman's own nature always threatens to offend. Of course, the happy social circle of women lends aid through encouragement and reproof. Religion, too, provides a comforting place (if she is obedient) where she can lavish her affections with certainty of return and reward.

Chudleigh describes the fear and complacency inherent in a system such as Chapone's, in which education serves custom and social appearances:

> The greatest part of Mankind are led by Opinion, and what they have once taken for Truth, they will never be at the Labour of examining. They are almost as much afraid of Innovations in Matters of Reason, as in those of Faith. Besides, 'tis painful to form a new set of Thoughts, to deviate from the beaten Road, to run counter to establish'd Maxims, to wander in unknown Paths, and follow Reason to

> her solitary Recess. . . . That which affords them a present Satisfaction, they fancy to be good . . . .(286)

Chapone is one of these comfortable, yet fearful mortals. She is proud of her moral orthodoxy, and is tentative in any of her revisions to a moral system which is acceptable in general. She is certain of what her identity should consist, and the borders of that identity, happily, agree with those set by good society. But she is not superficial in every sense of the word -- only in that which relates to the intellect and a sense of independence or uniqueness. She does not recommend hypocrisy to women, for she believes the inward feelings should accord in every particular with outward appearance and action. She leads women to improve their souls, to excel in moral courage and religious devotion, but only as far as these lead to social acceptance and a good reputation -- "present Satisfaction." Her models are the tightly corseted, morally strong Clarissa and Harriet Byron of Richardson's novels; Chudleigh, on the other hand, models herself upon the masculine wisdom and self-respect of the outcast Socrates.

Chapter Three

Hannah More,

Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799)

The most prolific, most controversial author among the three moralists under examination is Hannah More (1745-1833), whose life of eighty-eight years embraces Hester Chapone's flourishing career and the early Victorian era. Compared with Chudleigh and Chapone, More's *Strictures* is most similar to Chapone's *Letters*, because they shared the same cultural context. However, I believe More's work has more rigor and intellectual substance, and is therefore less like a conduct book than the *Letters*, and more of a wide-ranging treatise on the relation of women's education, morality, politics, and religion. While she probably did not know of Mary Chudleigh, her work recalls some of Chudleigh's radical ideas about women and evinces a similar independent spirit. Yet Hannah More is an uncommon figure in any group; her views about women are by turns inspiring and disappointing, and in general rather difficult to grasp -- there is no woman writer or moralist quite like her, before or after her time.

Hannah More was a poet, dramatist, religious moralist, novelist, Bluestocking (like Hester Chapone), and founder of Sunday Schools. Between 1773 and 1825 she published at least twenty-eight works. Among the best known during her life are *Sacred Dramas* (1782), *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* (1788), *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790), *Village Politics* (1792), *Cheap Repository Tracts* (at least 50 narrative tracts between 1795-8), *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), her novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) and *Practical Piety* (1811). In her London career she was close friends with the actor David Garrick and his wife, a friend of Samuel Johnson and Elizabeth Montagu in the Bluestocking circle; after Garrick's death in 1779 she lived a more serious life and moved away from dissipated London. In the 1790s More became involved in politics and took up the pen in reaction against the French Revolution. She also became connected with the Clapham

sect of Evangelicals, and befriended William Wilberforce, whose doctrines from *A Practical View of Christianity* (1797) she expounds in the final chapters of her *Strictures*. A controversial figure in her own lifetime, Hannah More's reputation declined further after her death; M. G. Jones wrote in 1952 that "the nineteenth century so effectively destroyed her reputation that today those who remember her name vaguely associate it with schools set up in the Mendip villages and with a series of unread and unreadable books" (228).

Hannah More still stands in the shadows today. It is her religiosity and her restriction of women to the domestic sphere that have dismayed the feminists of our time. She is often mistakenly figured as the ideological opposite of Mary Wollstonecraft, when in fact, the feminist goals of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) have much in common with More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). Miriam Leranbaum writes,

> though in their own eyes and those of almost all their contemporaries Hannah More was the absolute antithesis of Mary Wollstonecraft in personal behaviour and political ideology, many of their views on women's education, women's duties, and women's capacities were remarkably alike. (296)

More recently, Hannah More has been re-evaluated by Mitzi Myers, who can both admire and criticize her manner and ideas. Myers calls Hannah More "the late eighteenth-century female moral imperialist" ("Blagdon" 239). I will accent the various shades of More's character and ideas by placing her *Strictures* in the context of other moralists and educationalists of the eighteenth century including Mary Wollstonecraft, John Bennett, and James Fordyce, as well as comparing her with Mary Chudleigh and Hester Chapone.

Hannah More's *Strictures* incorporates much of the matter of her earlier *Essays on Various Subjects, principally designed for young ladies* (1777). She published them when she was thirty-three years old, with a design similar to Chapone's *Letters*, and like Chapone, dedicated them to Mrs. Montagu. However, later in life she was rather embarrassed by the *Essays* and did not re-publish them. Her essays are on issues of morality and gender, and throughout she asserts that the borders between the sexes established by "nature, propriety, and custom" must be maintained for the happiness of

individuals and the good of society. Although the bulk of her ideas are conservative, she is aware that they are not commonly accepted, and while she says she "fears" ladies' opposition, she takes pride in the probability of offending a great number of them by her boldness in defining their sexual weaknesses:

> The author fears it will be hazarding a very bold remark, in the opinion of many ladies, when she adds, that the female mind, in general, does not appear capable of attaining so high a degree of perfection in science as the male. (*Essays* 5-6)

"To amuse, rather than to instruct" is one of her goals in the *Essays*, but she only makes them amusing to a select group of female readers who enjoy their restrictive content and commanding style (12). By confidently speaking the words the harshest among male prescribers would speak, she expects that she will be granted the same authority that male conduct writers enjoy. The *Essays* are an immature production. She later altered her opinions about women, developed further insight into their lives, and polished her rhetoric so that she is less offensive and more compelling in her *Strictures*.

Almost every page of More's *Strictures* exudes authorial confidence, despite the consciousness that her sex may be held against her by some readers. More's confidence depends not only on her own familiarity with the advice genre and her social and historical conditions, but on the assumption that her readers are also familiar with these. As we decode a parable or allegory by the author's own textual clues and literary background, we should, to be just, attempt to understand More's *Strictures* according to the context she places it in. In her introduction she unashamedly outlines the basis and method by which her own book should be judged:

> But if on candidly summing up the evidence, the design and scope of the Author be fairly judged, not by the customs or opinions of the worldly, (for every English subject has a right to object to a suspected or prejudiced jury,) but by an appeal to that divine law which is the only infallible rule of judgment; if on such an appeal her views and principles shall be found censurable for their rigour, absurd in their requisitions, or preposterous in their restrictions, she will have no right to complain

> of such a verdict, because then she will stand condemned by that court to whose decision she implicitly submits. (xiii-xiv)

More demands to be taken very seriously and to be judged in reference to her Evangelical context: she asks for a lot from her contemporaries who may judge her work by her sex. The question is whether she asks too much of her modern feminist brothers and sisters who are less religious. After such a bold display of her authorial confidence, her last gesture in the introduction is humility. She affirms that she does not think herself as "the impeccable censor of her sex and of the world," but is motivated by "the tender and intimate participation of fellow-feeling" and "a sense of duty" (xiv). Although her zeal may place limits on her objectivity, More leaves us with no whining apology for the naiveté of her ideas or style, confident that if considered in the moral and religious context of her time, they will not appear ridiculous.

Hannah More begins her *Strictures* with a complaint which is based on the connection between education and conduct: "It is a singular injustice which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a very defective education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct" (vii). This premise is also voiced by John Bennett in his anonymously published *Strictures on Female Education* [1787]. He complains,

> We expect a rich, spontaneous harvest to spring from an untilled soil; and whilst we make [women's] failings inevitable by our remissness, we fail not to load them with the heaviest censure, ridicule and contempt. (3)

Bennett's and More's *Strictures* are similar in more than just their titles; they share enough to propose that Bennett's text was an important influence on Hannah More's *Strictures*. Both moralists promote the education of women on the basis of women's influence on men in childhood and youth. They both criticize the kind of education which teaches "Musick, dancing, accomplishments, dissipation and intrigue -- every thing but solid knowledge -- every thing but humility -- every thing but piety -- every thing but virtue" (Bennett 45). They both place severe limitations on woman's sphere and natural abilities

while focussing on the differences between the sexes. However, Bennett goes farther in his limitations than More, and writes with the caustic satire of a misogynist. A comparison of their works in the more controversial areas later in my discussion will contribute to an evaluation of More's feminism.

In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Hannah More's prefatory strategy is very similar to Mary Chudleigh's: make the book appeal to men by affirming their interests in women's morality, and appeal to women by offering them happiness and power. Early in the introduction to the *Strictures*, More tries to clear herself of the bias of her sex -- some readers may think that she will be too soft on women, and want to make things easier for them. As in her *Essays*, she is aware of giving offense: "The Author is apprehensive that she shall be accused of betraying the interests of her sex by laying open their defects" (vii). But this time, to conciliate her female readers, she represents herself as an objective and admonitory friend, the kind of friend admired by Chudleigh and Chapone. She intends neither indiscriminately to condemn or praise women, but "to turn their attention to objects calculated to promote their true dignity" (vii).

Like Chudleigh, More uses geographical and political metaphors. She expresses her allegiance to women thus: "to expose the weakness of the land as to suggest the necessity of internal improvement, and to point out the means of effectual defence, is not treachery, but patriotism" (viii). Yet Chudleigh's metaphors emphasize defense against inner rebels, not foreign attack. As Chudleigh does, More places herself in the role of the male scientist analyzing feminine nature: here "The moralist is somewhat in the situation of the Geographer" (viii). But in her metaphor, men are also represented as a country. She uses this trope to explain the differences and similarities between men and women, and to defend her practice of criticising the one sex and not the other. It seems that men and women are like adjacent countries: "the air, soil, and produce of the land which he is describing, cannot fail in many essential points to resemble those of other countries under the same parallel" (viii). The idea of the parallel hints at gender equality, and she confirms that gender similarities exist when she says the geographer "in drawing his ma . . . may

happen to introduce some of the neighboring coast" (viii). The metaphor of autonomous countries suggests women's independence as well as difference from men. Metaphors of countries and regions, including the domestic region of the home, abound in More's text, and they are figurative expressions of her most important themes: to protect England from French influence, and to promote women's function as guardians of the domestic and moral sphere.

In Hannah More's *Strictures* some other prominent concepts which are important to Mary Chudleigh reappear: in particular, the preference for mind over body, and the freedom and power women find in retirement, study and reason.

> Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect; it abstracts her from the world and its vanities; it fixes a wandering spirit, and fortifies a weak one; it divorces her from matter; it corrects that spirit of trifling which she naturally contracts from the frivolous turn of female conversation and the petty nature of female employments; it concentrates her attention, assists her in a habit of excluding trivial thoughts, and thus even helps to qualify her for religious pursuits. (114)

Here in More's language there is an association between women's lives and triviality which, as Donna Landry observes, "nearly erupts in a feminist analysis" of the society which makes female employments so petty (259).[1] More does analyze it, and attempts to change women's triviality in two ways: by educating women to fill domestic duties instead of dressing, dancing, and man-hunting, and by lifting women above the drudgery and detail of their lives to larger thoughts and issues, such as religion and truth. "The sort of education they commonly receive teaches girls to set a great price on small things" (245). But a more thorough education will set their minds on larger issues, and will encourage

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[1] Landry asks, "If women's education, such as it is, leads to a spirit of trifling and frivolity, then surely women's social situation needs a radical overhaul and not just the addition of periods of serious study?" (259). The tendency of Chudleigh, Chapone, and More to locate women's hope for social change in the long term influences of education, virtue and religion rather than direct social revolution is labeled by Landry as "protofeminist," a kind of limited vision, rather than a vision valid and empowering in its own manner.

men to respect women. Like Mary Chudleigh, Hannah More reminds women that the more men pay attention to their bodies, the less value women's souls will have. She argues that

> in those countries in which fondness for the mere persons of women is carried to the highest excess, *they are slaves*; and . . . their moral and intellectual degradation increases in direct proportion to the adoration which is paid to mere external charms. (2)

For Mary Chudleigh and Hannah More, the way to reach past the common level of women's reputation for intellect and virtue is through study -- the kind of study that extends a woman's mind into male realms of knowledge.

Moralists often use fear or crisis to persuade readers to action. Chapone uses the crisis of adolescence and the fear of social and religious punishment; Mary Chudleigh points to the aggravating injustice of men's monopolization of knowledge; but Hannah More's motivating crisis is the negative influence of "the most tremendous confederacies against religion, and order, and governments, which the world ever saw" -- the French revolution (3). More calls on fashionable women to stretch their influence into the male arena of politics: "I would call on them to come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country" (2-3). But they must do this using the tools they have already been given, without reaching for other kinds of power. By a somewhat irrelevant and flattering comparison of upper-class Englishwomen's opportunities with those of Arabian women, she convinces female readers that they are already blessed with access to "liberal instruction," the support and authority of "reasonable laws, of a pure religion, and all the [illegible]ing pleasures of an equal, social, virtuous, and delightful intercourse" (2). The up[illegible]es, then, she believes have more equality with men, and access to all the education [illegible]d for powerful rhetoric.

In order to encourage [illegible] readers to use their education to influence men in the right way, More illustrates that they are already using their conversational power in a negative way -- by ridiculing religion. She adds up women's trivial faults to the sum of a

national crisis. This "unintended mischief" would be stopped if each woman could see "in its collected force the annual aggregate of the random evil she is daily doing, by constantly throwing a *little* casual weight into the wrong scale, by mere inconsiderate and unguarded chat" (6). More does not ask herself whether the light ridicule of religion is a symptom of women's frustration, or evidence that women feel need to loosen their moral and religious bands by laughing at them. But More helps her readers to discern that not only does fear of shame influence women's morals, but women can shame young men into morality, or shame them out of it: "In the company of certain women of good fashion and no ill fame," a pious young man can "[make] shipwreck of his religion" (8). As a kind of moral justice, the same mechanism which keeps women in their place can be used on young men in their turn. A new generation of men can be molded by women, and thus women have some power over men's future conduct when they become husbands, fathers, governors and lawyers. "If it is given to women to regulate the desires of men," Armstrong reasons, "then domestication constitutes a political force of no meager consequence, according to More" (130).

While men would be comfortable with women's more trivial influence on their manners, Hannah More disturbs them with a suggestion that they depend on women's powerful moral influence. A woman is in an active role; she is reforming men, instructing men, improving her country and earning an eternal reward, not striving for the smaller reward of male approval and attention. As well, moral power is preferable to the misleading powers many male conduct writers encourage or allow in women: beauty, tears, sharp wit, affectation and flattery. According to Myers, this kind of morality is revolutionary: "aggressive female piety assails male bastions of power and privilege, attacks the double standard, demands that men forsake licence for domesticity -- . . . Christian virtues are feminine virtues" ("Blagdon" 245). Because of this moral independence, women have no need to fear men's ridicule. Hannah More goes farther than Chapone and offers more noble goals to women than "passive courage."

Women of the eighteenth-century, like Hester Chapone, were socially trained to fear censure and ridicule, and were in danger of indiscriminately accepting any judgment

made on their behavior or speech. The ridicule of women and the association of femininity with weakness and sensibility has had an effect on More herself, but she does not completely internalize it. She longs for an association of women, virtue and authority which she, in her role of cultural historian, finds in the practice of chivalry. However, she rejects the false power of women gained through sexual passion: "I do not wish . . . to reinstate women in that fantastic empire in which they then sat enthroned in the hearts, or rather the imaginations of men" (10). Like Jane Collier, author of *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753), "she is not encouraging women to be pleasing to men, but arguing for the right to moral responsibility, encouraging women to follow a higher route to self-esteem" (Hawley xvii). Not the middle ages' excessive sensibility, she points out, but its value for "religion and chastity" should be reinstated (11):

> it is the same religion and the same chastity which once raised [woman] to such an elevation, that must still furnish the noblest energies of her character; must still attract the admiration, still retain the respect of the other sex. (11)

More encourages women to put their "noblest energies" into action, to recreate the link between women and Christian virtue. A Christian "who is afraid to avow her principles, or ashamed to defend them, has little claim to that honourable title" (5). More does not approve of a woman who "with a half-earnestness, trims between the truth and the fashion," who defends religion "in a faint tone, a studied ambiguity of phrase" because she "is afraid to lose her reputation for wit, in proportion as she advances her credit for piety" (5). A woman must lose a sensually alluring reputation to gain a nobler, although a potentially more offensive reputation, similar to that of a moralist. The power of virtue and religion, which More hoped to make women represent, is thus preferred to the power of sensuality which Gregory, Fordyce, and Bennett urge women to use to augment (and contradict) their reputation for chastity. It is also an improvement on Chapone's suffering silence and dependence on fear and social pressure. In this sense More's text is a positive feminist improvement in the conduct literature of her time.

Because "More resists any unitary reading as either feminist heroine or compliant patriarchal victim," any thorough study of her work must face both the positive and

negative implications it raises for women (Myers "Blagdon" 249). Although she may be empowering in a limited way, there are some practical difficulties with More's characteristic exaltation of woman through religion and virtue. As in James Fordyce's *Sermons*, the whole concept of the power of ience on men is built on the foundation that men are the final end and mo eneficiaries of women's good behaviour and education. It is not good enough omen to be pious for their own benefit; to this they must add usefulness. More and others lay this moral power on women as a duty, not just a prerogative, and it may seem incredibly burdensome and oppressive to fulfil, especially since there are limited ways of being a virtuous woman in their culture. The only pedestal they can attempt to climb is one which men's biased prescriptions have helped to build -- hence the emphasis on female propriety comes immediately after the opportunity of influence in her *Strictures*. As well, if women are to be the embodiment of moral and eligious standards, it takes some responsibility off of men's shoulders, who can then t morally passive role, and sit down to be judges on women's moral success. And women hold little physical, legal, and economic power, they cannot constrain to reform outsi of their presence, and they may often obtain only a temporary admiration. In terms of social power, the new religious ideal of woman has its costs. Its benefits lie in another direction: "if the religious nexus constricted female life in some ways, it challenged, even liberated in others; the wearer's ideational corset braced no less than it bound," writes Myers ("Blagdon" 245). Women may be socially segregated to their homes and charity schools, but they were not therefore weakened.

When Hannah More offers women moral and religious power, a power which could indirectly affect politics, she represented it in a way that made it seem the opposite of the power of political rights which Mary Wollstonecraft represented. Yet each writer offers women real, valid power. Wollstonecra cs, especially those who focus on the legal and social status of women, emphasize the differences over the numerous fundamental similarities between *Strictures* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This is largely because Hannah More, her self-image free of "impious discontent," does not agitate for the extension of women's social and political roles. Hannah More herself "detested Mary Wollstonecraft's views" and "declared that she was invincibly resolved

never to read *The Rights of Women*" (Jones 115). In the *Strictures* More responds to Wollstonecraft's ideas thus:

> . . . among the innovators of this innovating period, the imposing term of ***rights*** has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, with a view not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonourable to their sex, but produced with a view to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world. (193)

In the 1790s, opinions about Wollstonecraft were often strongly calumniating, especially when the shocking details of her illegitimate child and suicide attempts added fuel to the controversy. In "A Revolution in Female Manners" Mitzi Myers chronicles the way that the More-Wollstonecraft opposition has been inverted and continued by literary critics. In the estimation of Maurice Quinlan, Lawrence Stone, Lynne Agress, "More is the premier villain; Wollstonecraft, the lonely exception" among the late eighteenth-century women's education writers who, they argue, hindered the growth of feminism (Myers, "Revolution" 201).

But except for some brave suggestions about women's employment and political rights, Wollstonecraft adheres to More's ideal of the domestic, virtuous woman. For the greater part of the *Rights of Woman*, women's essential independence and freedom is mental and moral, not economic or political. "[W]omen cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits" sounds like a plea for women's economic pursuits, but the sentence continues -- "for they will not fulfil family duties, unless their minds take a wider range" (Wollstonecraft 174). Even the political duty of women is domestic in the *Rights of Woman*: as a man fulfils the duties of a citizen, "his wife, also an active citizen, should be equally intent to manage her family, educate her children, and assist her neighbours" (146). It is not primarily political power, but independence and self-control she seeks: "I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves" (62). And, like More and Fordyce, she reckons women are domestic beings: "whatever tends to

incapacitate the maternal character, takes woman out of her sphere" (177).[2] As one of her important contributions to the equality of women, Wollstonecraft disbelieves in attributing sex to different kinds of virtue or knowledge; yet she allows domesticity to limit the degree of women's education.[3]

A noticeable difference between the *Rights of Woman* and *Strictures* is their two different kinds of Christian belief, one more doctrinal than the other. More bases individual morality on Christ's redemption of fallen humanity, but Wollstonecraft bases morality on human reason: "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" (21). More relies on the scriptures as an accurate description of woman's nature and duty, but Wollstonecraft laughs at the idea of woman actually being created from Adam's rib, and defines Christian humility as degradation.[4] Piety makes its salutary appearance in the *Vindication*, in an ambiguous form. Wollstonecraft asserts that "The only solid foundation for morality appears to be the character of the supreme Being" (46). The nature of God and the rules of morality Wollstonecraft gathers from reason, not revelation. For Wollstonecraft as for Mary Astell, reason is what makes man and woman essentially equal; for Hannah More, Christianity is the basis of sexual equality.

However, one should not make the mistake of associating More's piety with irrationality or passivity, simply because she does not exalt reason above revelation. Unlike Chapone, both Wollstonecraft and More disagree with Dr. Gregory's statement that "Religion is rather a matter of sentiment than reasoning" (13).[5] In *Strictures* both strong thought and affection are united in the ideal Christian woman. Although More believes women's natures lean towards religion, she certainly does not believe they will acquire it by irrational means:

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[2] Here Wollstonecraft sounds very much like John Bennett: "Whatever *undomesticates* a woman, so far unmakes her, as to all the valuable purposes of her existence, and is, at once, the bane of her usefulness, her happiness and virtue." (144)

[3] "not only the virtue, but the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree" (Wollstonecraft 39).

[4] See *Vindication*, p. 26.

[5] "I consider religion in a light opposite to that recommended by Dr. Gregory, who treats it as a matter of sentiment or taste" (Wollstonecraft 47).

> Do young persons then become musicians, and painters, and linguists, and mathematicians by early study and regular labour; and shall they become Christians by accident? . . . Is it not supposing that religion, like "reading and writing, comes by Nature?" (147)

"People are no more to be cheated into religion than into learning," she argues later, and shows this respect by devoting a great part of her text to explaining religious doctrine (164). For the most part, when More uses the word "reason" and "understanding," she means intellect, not "reasonableness" or opinion; when she uses them in Chapone's sense it is obvious.[6] M. G. Jones retains respect for More on this basis: "There is in her writings none of the contempt for the things of the intellect attributed to the Evangelicals of her day" (233). Jones quotes a telling passage from her *Essays*: "I put religion in my right hand and learning on my left. Learning should not be despised even as an auxiliary" (233).

And, just because Wollstonecraft is considered the radical reformer, More should not be held to be the opposite: a defender of the *status quo*. Although More's faith was of a kind that implied physical and social difference and inequality between the sexes, this same faith grants women and men what she considers the most essential equality: equality in spirit, equality before God. Myers, in her article "Cultural Politics of the Blagdon Controversy" explains how politically radical this kind of equality could be: when More refused to fire an Evangelical Sunday-school teacher at the request of the local clergy, her enemies portrayed her as "a self-aggrandizing, apostate she-saint to be purged from the church calendar for transgressing clerical boundaries and biting the sacerdotal hands that flattered her" (240). Apparently Hannah More takes on a different color depending on the glasses worn by her critics. Myers continues: "Socially hierarchical, spiritually egalitarian Tories [like More] who foster radical causes like antislavery and lower-class education fit uneasily into conventional political schemes" ("Blagdon" 239). Yet even in a conventional religious scheme, though her feminism becomes more apparent, her contradictions remain.

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[6] More considers Christianity a "*reasonable* service" and says that "Faith does not consist merely in submitting the opinions of the understanding, but the dispositions of the heart" (More 302,310).

There seems to be some recent controversy over the validity of More's religious and moral contexts. To Mitzi Myers' complaint that "Modern scholarship . . . myopically reproduces the anti-Jacobin opposition of More and Wollstonecraft" by focussing on politics, Donna Landry replies, "this argument, grounded in social anthropology rather than social history, depoliticizes the differences between Wollstonecraft and More" (Myers, "Revolution" 201; Landry 260). Apparently Myers is accused of losing her critical objectivity and "reproduc[ing] an orthodoxy that is more than a little gender-biased and certainly reductive" (Landry 19), or "reproducing the separate spheres doctrine in her critique of More's work" (Kirkpatrick 225). Why must a re-evaluation of Hannah More's work in either context -- political or anthropological -- be considered mere reproduction? A political view highlights More's conservative aspects, but I propose that we should also look at *Strictures* in its moral and Evangelical context, which reveals her "aggressive female piety" (Myers, "Blagdon" 245).

Hannah More thought Wollstonecraft's ideas about changing the social hierarchy were outrageous, but these women both wrote in a similar spirit of "aggressive female piety." Neither Wollstonecraft nor More thought it irreligious or presumptuous to be discontented with women's education in their culture, which was apparently not one of God's ordained systems. Both texts argue that women should study more serious and masculine subjects, and that sensibility should not be overdeveloped. A more reasonable education makes a better mother, wife, and mistress of a household. It would woman less frivolous, and keep her mind on more noble things, like duty, love, and faith, instead of the trivial things related to the body. Female weaknesses such as fear, vanity, and manipulative behavior are not the amiable qualities other moralists would make them seem; they are truly defects and must be healed. Also, the right kind of conduct is properly taught and maintained by attention to inner principles, not superficial or practical considerations like reputation or appearance. In all these essential things, More and Wollstonecraft emphatically agree.

Perhaps because of her own fulfilling religious and public life, More is quite satisfied with the idea that women's virtues and achievements gain them no immediate,

sensible reward from the world. She argues that the traditional accomplishments imbue a desire for the aristocratic reward of fame. Other rewards come with fame, for Armstrong explains that authors like More

> portrayed aristocratic women along with those who harbored aristocratic pretensions as the very embodiments of corrupted desire, namely desire that sought its gratification in economic and political terms. (97)

This causes a problem, for how are virtuous women to find motivation if there is no obvious or external recompense for their labour? More addresses the issue:

> [women's] talents are neither rewarded with public honours nor emoluments in life; nor with inscriptions, statues, and mausoleums after death. It has been absurdly represented to them as an hardship, that while they are expected to perform duties, they must yet be contented to relinquish honours, and must unjustly be compelled to renounce fame, while they must sedulously labour to deserve it. (202)

Her solution lies in convincing women to substitute these rewards: "The Christian hope more than reconciles Christian women to these petty privations, by substituting a nobler prize for their ambition" (203). Men are rewarded with fame, honour, and money; women can apparently take part in another, "nobler" economy of labour and harvest: the economy of virtue. Women consume books and produce virtue. "Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned profession; but it is to come out in conduct" (More 181). The question, as with Chapone, is whether this insubstantial reward can sustain good conduct without the incentive of fame or social approval.

Kathryn Kirkpatrick reminds us of the linguistic and ideological connection between property and propriety in the late eighteenth century: both words could mean "a piece of land owned by someone, a private possession or estate" (200). As women lost control over property in the eighteenth century, and gained more leisure, the focus on propriety increased. James Fordyce follows the same reasoning:

> The human mind was made for action. In virtuous action consists its highest enjoyment. . . . But now there are many young ladies whose situation does not supply a sphere of domestic exercise sufficient to fill up that part of their time . . . What then shall they do with it, or with themselves, if books be not called in to their assistance? (144)

Kirkpatrick surmises from this change in economy that "the new domestic woman was to be constructed precisely for her usefulness to the propertied male" (205). Apparently she believes that women who lost rights to property became property themselves, and yielded their conduct as tribute to their proprietors.

But there is another way of viewing the connection between property and propriety: a woman could see her propriety as the improveable part of herself, just as she once improved land; the yield, because hidden to most as a "negative" virtue, remains in her own possession, where it adds to her value in her own and God's eyes. In More's economy of moral approbation, a woman is thus rendered independent and self-sufficient: she labours for her conscience first, her family and society second. This ideal woman, who prefers the shade, expresses her independence through what looks like submission to the standard of feminine modesty:

> To woman, therefore, whatever be her rank, I would recommend a predominance of those more sober studies, which, not having display for their object, may make her wise without vanity, happy without witnesses, and content without panegyrists; the exercise of which will not bring celebrity, but improve usefulness. (181)

Like Chapone, More believes that accomplishments which feed vanity, such as music and dancing, are selfish. She adds the thought that they can make a woman dependent on praise. In contrast, unseen domestic virtues like household economy are noble in themselves and useful for others. The sensations of usefulness, dutifulness, and professional efficiency should be gratifying enough to the woman. For home economics consists not in the mechanical motions of "a little mind" following directions,

> it is the exercise of a sound judgment exerted in the comprehensive outline of order, of arrangement, of distribution; of regulations by which alone well-governed societies, great and small, subsist. (183)

More does not stoop to use as persuasives the lust for praise or the fear of blame, which Chapone considers important. Thus a woman's wide-ranging study is an improvement of the self before it becomes a benefit to others, and teaches the mind to be satisfied with the pleasure of its own functions. Through intellectual improvement, the product stays within the woman and her domestic realm, and is not spread abroad:

> She should pursue every kind of study which will teach her to elicit truth; which will lead her to be intent upon realities; will give precision to her ideas; will make an exact mind. . . . That kind of knowledge which is rather fitted for home consumption than foreign exportation, is peculiarly adapted to women. (181-182)

Through the dutiful use of her mind, a woman avoids causing household disorder, a consequence painful to herself. But by stressing the joys of thought and self-approbation, More shows how independence of mind and social usefulness do not exclude one another, as they do in Chapone's *Letters*.

Education is a tool More puts in women's hands; an informed conscience and reason renders a woman independent of men's praise or blame. In contrast, Kirkpatrick notices that Fordyce "place[s] himself in a position of considerable power with his readers, for it is *he* who can inform them of what men really think of them" (207). By telling women how men judge them when they are not present, and how men can really think meanly of women they flatter, Fordyce instills fear and makes men like himself into the indispensable advisors, consumers and judges of women's conduct. More, however, offers women moral independence; women can be the producers and primary consumers of their own knowledge and virtue, in the same way that Mary Chudleigh's essays were intended for her own mental improvement before they were offered to the public. The objective result may flatter men with a sense of power and possession, but More shows how the transaction, viewed from the woman's perspective, can lose its humiliating flavour and become its own reward regardless of what men think. Through her advice,

women can own and value themselves at the same time as being useful to others. Of course, women receive some tribute from the outside world, often unspoken. Women can be famous for the way they avoid fame, and feel proud that they can spread happiness while not being noticed or considered proud. Like Chudleigh, More wants women to reward themselves with the immaterial, and therefore more dependable, substances of self-approbation and God's approval. More adds to this the pleasurable sense of being useful and needed by others.

The moralist's philosophy of two economies operating simultaneously is not new; it is at least as old as "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." If women see that they can receive nobler rewards than men, they will no longer be in competition with them, and "Co-operation and not competition" is the principle on which More establishes this underground economy of self-improvement and reward (189). Armstrong explains that in order to win a prosperous man, women "had to lack the competitive desires and worldly ambitions that consequently belonged -- as if by some natural principle -- to the male" (96-7). More agrees that women's education will hold practical value to the men as "the most likely means to put an end to those petty and absurd contentions for equality which female smatterers so anxiously maintain" (189). Yet, on the subjective side of things, it certainly takes more than common intelligence and education to participate in a system which is silent and immaterial, while men and other women strive for and earn the sensible fame that feeds their ambition -- and their narrow pocketbooks. To view it another way, however, all this mental exertion could indicate the desperate philosophy of a woman anxiously trying to find ways to adapt to a painful inequality. But her philosophy is painful and exacting only to the first generation of women. In time, as more women successfully adapt to this alternate economy, they will at least have the praise and support of other women like themselves. Partly as a result of More's influence, nineteenth-century women could more easily earn their fame as producers of moral conduct. Unfortunately, the fulfilment of this system brings its own degeneration, for women in such a morally sensitive society can bypass the essential step of self-approbation. Because of the ease and necessity of gaining moral praise from

others, women will once again be faced with the temptation to hypocrisy and dependence on praise.

Mary Chudleigh solved the problem of women's reward another way: to satisfy the human hunger for achievement and respect, she appropriated male standards of literary and learned fame, and urged women to vie with men as their equals, and earn a place in the firmament of intellectual and moral excellence. But while *Strictures* encourages women to the same kinds of masculine studies, it breaks the illusion of external reward by reminding them that however learned ladies may be, their fame is soon eclipsed by their sex. Bennett writes,

> If we admit that such descriptions have not been exaggerated; if we could suppose that we were not treading upon fairy ground (and yet who must not have his doubts?) have any of these female efforts pleased, or have any of these unnatural labours gained immortality? Either they never existed at all, or they have been raised infinitely beyond the bounds of probability and truth. (119-20)

More, like Bennett, ridicules the attempts of such women as Chudleigh and Astell -- and herself. Perhaps she realizes from her own experience the futility of aspiring for genuine respect by competing with men, although her pen rewarded her financially. More knows how condescending men can be, giving a learned woman the "qualified approbation, *that [she] is really extraordinary for a woman*" (188). She observes that this is "the same kind of praise which we bestow on certain sallads, which often draw from us a sort of wondering commendation; not indeed as being worth much in themselves" (188-89). A woman pursuing fame, however worthy she is, may be foolishly casting her pearls before swine. "It is a woman's participation in public spectacle that injures her," explains Armstrong, "for as an object of display, she always loses value as a subject" (116). But as elusive as the desire for fame can be, it is not as pernicious as the desire to participate in politics. Eminent Englishwomen of the past desired "merely a kind of imaginary prerogative . . . a shadowy claim to a few unreal acres of Parnassian territory," but Wollstonecraft and her followers, complains More, are presumptuously -- and misguidedly -- "bring[ing] forward political as well as intellectual pretensions" (193). Thus ambition

for male rewards and powers is not only unvirtuous in a woman, but made impossible by sexual prejudice.

More continues to discourage women from literary ambitions of the kind she herself must have had during her own career as a poet, dramatist, and member of the Bluestocking club of intellectual Londoners. She ridicules aspiring women novelists (those with true genius are the exception) whose only education has been reading novels. At the time, novels were considered an inferior genre, dangerous to the morals of their readers; moralists like James Fordyce, Samuel Johnson, Hester Chapone, and even Mary Wollstonecraft viewed them with suspicion and disdain. These "hackney'd adventures" are easy to imitate, and elicit in naive readers "the stirring impulse of corresponding genius" (117). The new writer then "solaces her imagination" that the subscription is "an homage to her genius," when it is really "extorted by her importunity, or given to her necessities"(117). More demeans, in general, the genre of novels, and the majority of novelists, a strategy which Wollstonecraft also recommends.[7]

Kirkpatrick sees More's disdain for novels and women novelists as a disgraceful rhetorical tactic, one which condemns a woman for overstepping class boundaries as well as feminine modesty: "here More assures her readers that middle-class women cannot write and that therefore any bid for independence by them on this front is futile" (214). I question whether this is More's condescending attitude to the middle class, while I concede it is condescending. After all, it is to "that more elevated . . . that more important class of females, to whose use this little work is more immediately dedicated," and though she often refers to the whole sex, specific reference to "humbler females" are digressions (41,40). Could it not be true, since there is no overt reference to class in this satiric section, that More is justifiably concerned about the quality of women's reading and writing, which are merely subsets, respectively, of women's education and conduct? Her complaint is that "Capacity and cultivation are so little taken into account, that writing a book seems to be now considered as the only sure resource which the idle and the illiterate

[7] Wollstonecraft calls novels "flimsy works" and a "muddy source" of knowledge, and believes "The best method . . . that can be adopted to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them" with discretion (195).

have always in their power" (118). These seem like reasonable concerns. However, the conduct-book context of More's ridicule offers more insight into her tactics.

Like most writers advocating an improved education for women, More must answer the common fear that a solid education will make "scholastic ladies or female dialecticians," and "convert ladies into authors" (116). Myers writes that "More as author . . . repeatedly confounds interpretive models of anxious female writing" ("Blagdon" 228). But in this case she is in a defensive mode, and must carefully contain her approval of woman writers like herself. She boasts that her system of education will weed out women writers unfit for the vocation by humbling them: "by shewing them the possible powers of the human mind, you will bring them to see the littleness of their own" (116). More leaves a slim opportunity of authorship open to the few who have "native strength and mother-wit," coupled with study; she discourages such pretensions in general (187). In the "generality of readers," yet not all, knowledge of good literature will "check presumption" to be a writer (116). In a later chapter, she camouflages the valid option of female authorship under gestures of conservatism: "I am by no means *encouraging* young ladies to turn authors; I am only reminding them, that '*Authors before they write should read;*' I am only putting them in mind that to be ignorant is not to be original" (186). By such a carefully-phrased reminder, she is challenging aspiring authors to be well-read, but not utterly disallowing them the role. When she describes a hasty poet, rushing to extort the praise of the "sallad" for her seeming genius, More suggests two options for improvement: either the poet should have "taken a longer time, or refrained from writing at all; as in the former case the work would have been less defective, and in the latter the writer would have discovered more humility and self-distrust" (187). However, if the same species of authoress had been more industrious, "the commendation of judgment, knowledge, and perseverance . . . would probably be within [her] reach" (187). Apparently it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a woman to enter the club of the Muses, but it is still possible and worthy of real praise when it happens.

Many writers on education besides More have made female genius an exception when they described the nature of women. Bennett and other misogynists ridiculed these women and annulled their importance when attempting to discern women's nature in general. At times Bennett seems to enact his own aphorism that "Many, like a Judas, betray [women] with a kiss" (5):

> The Romans mention several illustrious women, whom science crowning with its greenest laurels, has preserved from that oblivion, which is, too generally, the portion of the fair. But they are mentioned, only to be disapproved by every person of sentiment and taste. Their attainments were of an enormous and improper kind; a dropsy in the understanding. (Bennett 30-31)

Bennett's flattery bites: at first he seems to praise brilliant women, then he insults them. When More makes the exception of such women, she retains the value of their excellence, while discounting the value of the excessive flattery they excited. She grants gifted women immunity to some of the harsh statements she makes on the nature and duty of women:

> No censure is levelled at the exertions of real genius, which is as valuable as it is rare; but at the absurdity of that system which is erecting *the whole sex* into artists. (46)

Even women who are not geniuses can attain excellence by hard work, but not in the field of fine arts or literature:

> a self-imposed attention sharpens observation, and creates a spirit of inspection and inquiry, which often lifts a common understanding to a degree of eminence in knowledge, sagacity, and usefulness, which indolent or negligent genius does not always reach. (84)

Hannah More, along with Elizabeth Montagu, was the patron of the milkmaid poet, Ann Yearsley, who showed genius despite her low class and relative lack of education. While More encouraged the publication of her verses, she did not want the money they earned to raise Yearsley above her station. Their relationship ended painfully with Yearsley's

rebellion against More's restrictions on the use of the money. In Yearsley's case, although the genius of the poetry deserved merit and publication, in More's opinion the poet's sex and class did not entitle her to the unmediated rewards of fame and money.[8]

One of the most disturbing chapters in the *Strictures* is the chapter on a comparative view of the sexes, in which More "is concerned with describing an essential nature for women" (Kirkpatrick 215). However, on a closer look at this unsavory chapter, we find that More is not always describing the *nature* of women; her statements are often linguistically tagged as hypothetical arguments, or descriptions of the way things *seem*. While More does assert that women have a providentially proscribed realm and role and nature, she is not therefore unaware of the influence of culture on the way those essential qualities are expressed. It takes a sensitive, detailed assessment to discern the differences between the natural and cultural aspects of More's generalized view of woman.

More has inherited much of her doctrine of gender differences from Bennett's *Strictures*. Perhaps one of the most illuminating ways of examining More's remarks is to compare the differences between her and Bennett on this subject. Bennett wipes away all questions of nature and nurture of women by an unfounded assertion of their inferiority:

> But whether it arises form an *original* defect in their frame and constitution, whether it is that an unquiet Imagination and ever restless sensibility afford not opportunity or *leisure* enough for *deep* meditation, it is very certain, that they cannot, like the men, arrange, combine, abstract, pursue and diversify a long strain of ideas, and in every thing, that requires the more substantial talents, must submit to a strong and marked inferiority. (Bennett 112)

On the level of content, More owes much to Bennett, but notice the hesitation she expresses:

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[8] Yearsley's husband was an alcoholic, and this was another factor More considered when she chose to keep Yearsley's money in trust.

> In summing up the *evidence*, *if I may so speak*, of the different capacities of the sexes, *one may venture, perhaps, to assert*, that women have *equal* parts, but are *inferior* in wholeness of mind, in the integral understanding . . . ; that if women have in an *equal* degree the faculty of fancy . . . and the faculty of memory . . . , they *seem not* to possess in *equal* measure the faculty of comparing, combining, analyzing, and separating these ideas; that deep and patient thinking which goes to the bottom of a subject; nor that power of arrangement which knows how to link a thousand connected ideas in one dependent train . . . . (More 197, my italics)

More's description is based on evidence from her own observation and reading, not on a presumptuous certainty of woman's nature. Several introductory phrases ask the reader's permission to include such speculative matter, and More changes her pronoun "I" to the distancing pronoun "one," as if she is ashamed to claim the ideas as her own. Her insistence on linking "equal" with ideas of inequality, twice, contrasts with Bennett's emphatic judgment of "strong and marked inferiority." The hesitation and lack of clarity in More's arguments express an inner conflict among Christian doctrine, tradition, and her own image of women which she has not resolved.

The dialogue between the texts does not end here, however. More's footnote to the passage above is a personal response to the ideas she hedges with uncertainty. In it she shows evidence of extreme distaste for the pride that lurks behind Bennett's misogyny:

> What indisposes even reasonable women to concede in these points is, that the weakest man instantly lays hold on the concession; and, on the mere ground of sex, plumes himself on his own individual superiority; inferring that the silliest man is superior to the first-rate woman. (197)

"Reasonable women" like More are unwilling to believe that Bennett's philosophy applies to men and women individually, and she hints that the "mere ground of sex" is not enough to prove every man's superiority.

In the next step of reasoning, both Bennett and More bring up the objection that until women are educated as men, the difference between them cannot be judged

accurately. The important objection is marginalized in Bennett's text by prefacing it with the words "It may be said" and concluding with an non-committal "This is all, in some measure, true" (113). Contrast this with More's diction, which emphasizes justice and truth:

> Here it may be *justly* enough retorted, that, as it is allowed the education of women is so defective, the *alleged* inferiority of their minds may be accounted for on that ground *more justly* than by ascribing it to their natural make. And, indeed, there is *so much truth* in the remark, that till women shall be more reasonably educated, and till the native growth of their mind shall cease to be stinted and cramped, we have *no juster ground* for pronouncing that their understanding has already reached its highest attainable point . . . . (197-8, my italics)

In this passage More has resumed her usual confidence. Bennett, however, does not allow this issue of education to change his opinion of women. He ignores the just and reasonable objection (which he calls "the subtilties of argument") in order to say that the equality of women and men is "a question, which every man's convictions and private observations will answer in the *negative*, whatever tenderness to the sex may lead him to *affect*, or delicacy to *conceal*" (115). Perhaps Bennett's individual bias and conceit is what prompted More to write the pointed footnote quoted above.

If Wollstonecraft had decided to compare the nature of the sexes, she would have perhaps come up with a picture of woman's nature similar to More's. Wollstonecraft, however, is wise enough to avoid explaining why she "cannot help, agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species" (35). She encompasses the comparison in a single sentence:

> But avoiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. (35)

It appears to Wollstonecraft that, in general, women are inferior to men, whether by nature or through culture she does not say; men have merely increased that inferiority. Like More, she proposes a more equal education as a test of women's true nature: "Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale" (Wollstonecraft 35).

Ultimately, More distracts us from the question of male and female nature, which has for its object "the poor precedence for a few short years" (199). She reverts to the more easily apprehensible judgments of religion, which assure her beyond evidence that the sexes are essentially equal:

> But whatever characteristical distinctions may exist . . . there is one great and leading circumstance which raises her importance, and even establishes her equality. Christianity has exalted women to true and undisputed dignity; in Christ Jesus . . . there is neither "male nor female." (198-99)

She is aware that this equality is not apparent in "a defective system of society" like her own, and that it has taken amazing strength for women, like the Christians of the Reformation, to have mentally and spiritually "shaken off the fetters of prejudice" (198). But that is as far as women's emancipation should go, in More's opinion. More's triumphal introduction of Christianity, like Bennett's reversion to personal opinion, is a gesture that takes us away from reason and evidence.

More returns to the subject of describing women's nature, adopting a rhetoric of balance. She does not see women's nature as a determining factor in their morals or intellect -- a woman could interpret her culturally defined nature as both a handicap and a blessing. If, in general, women's "hearts are naturally soft and flexible," flexibility is both "favourable to the cultivation of a devotional spirit" and a dangerous quality which may "lay them more open to the seductions of temptation and error" (199). If women are "naturally more affectionate than fastidious, they are likely both to read and to hear with a less critical spirit than men" (200). Despite this "advantage" of an uncritical spirit in religious faith, women "should also bear in mind that their more easily received impressions [are] often less abiding" (201). Although More has no evidence besides her

own experience and received opinion, she is careful throughout not to let women's "nature" take on strikingly negative or positive meanings. By this balance, readers are not tempted to use their female nature as excuses for pride and laziness or proof of inferiority.

While a woman's natural tendencies to sensibility are ambiguous in their implications, somehow a woman's social conditions are not. Instead of making earth as truly egalitarian as heaven, More gives optimistic advice about how individual women can imaginatively transform their present social disadvantages into moral and spiritual advantages. This time there is no balance in her rhetoric, only compensation. Whatever the social conditions are, women are only invited to imagine them positively. Exclusion from male realms is reinterpreted as the protection and blessing of Providence: "If we have denied [women] the possession of talents which might lead them to excel as lawyers, they are preserved from the peril of having their principles warped . . ." (201). The pattern continues: "If we should question their title" to a certain male station, "they are happily exempt" from its moral dangers (201). This is another of More's psychological adaptations to what appears unjust, but here she makes her statements even more painful to female readers by the way she includes herself in the "we" who deny women a larger scope. The rewards of exclusion (or protection) are represented as outweighing the "petty privations" (203). Once again she reverts to the idea of spiritual equality as a final consolation. Women are reminded of their glorious "hereafter" and their immaterial reward "here," which is an "importance in society unknown to the most polished ages of antiquity" (203). Thus her discussion of women's social restrictions is incomplete and biased. There is only one option "if women should lament": they should convince themselves "to account it as a privilege" that they are excluded (203). More offers no negative way of imagining this exclusion, and the limit of her rhetoric happens to be identical with the walls of the domestic world.

Hannah More has other rhetorical methods by which she reduces the competition between men and women. When More advises how girls should be instructed, she modifies the reasoning of a chain of educationalists who struggled to explain away the apparent native brilliance of young girls. Two earlier writers demonstrate how the same

observations could be used to make disparate conclusions. The anonymous author of *Female Rights Vindicated* (1758) observes that

> In Girls one may discover more Ease, Genius and Address, when Fear or Shame does not hinder their Ideas . . . they attain much quicker any Thing that is taught them, when equal Pains are taken to instruct them: They are more assiduous, and have greater Patience in performing any Exercise; are more humble, modest and reserved: In a word, one may discover in them, in a much higher Degree, all those excellent Qualities which indicate a superior Genius. (44)

This author goes on to lament that boys' genius is nurtured more than girls', "whilst the Effeminacy of the Women is left to increase upon them, through Idleness or Ignorance, by the most puerile or the meanest Vocations" (45). Bennett, however, takes girls' early genius as evidence of their inferiority:

> At this age, in point of quickness, docility and imagination, females may be pronounced to have the advantage. But this is, by no means, any adequate proof of their general superiority. Possibly the profounder thoughtfulness of the boy may obstruct the more brilliant and shewy exertions. . . . the very nature of [a girl's] qualities precludes that superiority of strong judgment and of nice discrimination, which are the more peculiar prerogative of men. (105-107)

More, like Bennett, associates brilliance and show with superficiality, and strength of mind with quietness. But she does not believe that judgment and discrimination are the supreme prerogative of men. In fact, she changes the objects of comparison and thus avoids any question of sexual superiority. She uses the qualities that Bennett and the author of *Female Rights Vindicated* used, not to distinguish men and women, but two kinds of women. "A romantic *girl* with a pretension to sentiment" is not like "those more quiet *women*, who have meekly sat down in the humble shades of prose and prudence" in their early years (185, my italics). Like the young girl of Bennett's description, once More's romantic girl "is driven off her 'vantage ground of partiality, sex, and favour, she will commonly sink to the level of ordinary capacities" (185). Her quiet women, like the late-

maturing, more robust men of Bennett's text, "rise afterwards much higher in the scale of intellect, and acquire a much larger stock of sound knowledge for far better purposes than mere display" (185-6). By adapting the terms of the traditional argument to the mental characteristics and development of girls, without comparing them with boys, she eliminates conflict between the sexes. She also introduces a healthy sense of competition among women.

More returns to the geographic metaphor to compare two kinds of women in another way. The "inhabitants of the luxuriant southern clime" rely on their mental fertility "as a reason for doing nothing," but "the native of the less genial region, supplying by his labours the deficiencies of his lot, overtakes his more favoured competitor . . . and thus vindicates Providence from the charge of partial distribution" (101). This model, used to encourage less gifted women, is also useful when encouraging women to study, in the face of the discouraging degree of superiority men currently seem to have over them. Through rhetoric, limits are transformed into challenges: women can grow into whole creatures despite what More sees as sexual handicaps and social disadvantages to learning.

In *Strictures*, woman's manner and sphere of influence are limited by propriety, but More does not therefore limit women's education to instruction in politeness, submission, and household economy. Both Hannah More and Hester Chapone often emphasize propriety and practicality in women's education. They agree that "The chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life" (181). But in More's mind, a woman's practical roles include a large realm of action, and require overall improvement of her mind:

> A general capacity for knowledge, and the cultivation of the understanding at large, will always put a woman into the best state for directing her pursuits into those particular channels which her destination in life may afterwards require. (187)

Elsewhere More takes a long look at the effects of certain kinds of reading on the female mind itself, before it issues in behavior. She is of the opinion that most women suffer from

an excess of imagination, and the proper prescription for them is a stiff dose of male reasoning. Isaac Watts' *The Improvement of the Mind* is among the books recommended by Hannah More in her chapter on female study:

> I mean not to recommend books which are immediately religious, but such as exercise the reasoning faculties, teach the mind to get acquainted with its own nature, and to stir up its powers. Let not a timid young lady start if I should venture to recommend to her, after a proper course of preparatory reading, to swallow and digest such strong meat as Watts's or Duncan's little book of Logic, some parts of Mr. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, and Bishop Butler's Analogy. (113-14)

More asserts that books like Chapone's, "those popular books which are used in general instruction," watered down for women's ease and enjoyment of reading, are actually weakening women's minds (106). Chapone's *Letters* are accommodated to a young feminine mind, and therefore they lack intellectual rigor. Chapone notes that "there have been so many ingenious contrivances to make geography easy and amusing," and to this she happily adds her own female guide to the Bible, and a summary of chronology (130). But More assures mothers that "there is no short cut" to learning, not even "for the accommodation of opulent inactivity or feminen (sic) weakness" (107). However difficult study may be for women, it is good for their moral exercise to grasp at that very fruit which proved mankind's downfall:

> The tree of knowledge, as a punishment, perhaps, for its having been at first unfairly tasted, cannot now be climbed without difficulty; and this very circumstance serves afterwards to furnish not only literary pleasures, but moral advantages. For the knowledge which is acquired by unwearied assiduity is lasting in the possession, and sweet to the possessor; both perhaps in proportion to the cost and labour of the acquisition. (107)

Women must assimilate aspects of male nature to improve themselves, according to the *Strictures*. More represents the educator as a doctor, in an "analogy between the mental and bodily conformation of women:" (113)

> If [a doctor] prescribe[s] the bracing medicines for a body of which delicacy is the disease, the [teacher] would do well to prohibit relaxing reading for a mind which is already of too soft a texture, and should strengthen its feeble tone by invigorating reading. (113)

In this analogy, a man is the model of health, and a woman without the medicine of a masculine education is naturally weak. The prescription of books should not be diluted, nor its dose diminished, by being adapted to women's currently weak state:

> "The swarms of *Abridgments*, *Beauties*, and *Compendiums*, which form too considerable a part of a young lady's library, may be considered in many instances as an infallible receipt for making a superficial mind. (111)

Girls must become less feminine, and limit the growth of imagination and sensibility: "The irregular fancy of women is not sufficiently subdued by early application, nor tamed by labour" (110). The imagery of taming and subduing is applied to the feminine aspects, and the masculine ones are only acquired by hard work. Compared with men, it currently seems that "women have equal *parts*, but are inferior in *wholeness* of mind" (196). But she also believes that "there is a wholeness, an integrity, a completeness in the Christian character," and therefore she is not content to leave women partially developed (347). But there are limits to this development analogous to the limits of the domestic sphere -- women must not adopt masculine mannerisms:

> while we bear in mind that helplessness is not delicacy, let us also remember that masculine manners do not necessarily include strength of character nor vigour of intellect. (42)

A woman may have "vigour of intellect" without offending society. Since More has no fear of a masculine mind issuing in pedantic speech or a swaggering walk, her education can endow women with qualities of mind which moralists have traditionally considered off limits. Now women can acquire traits of mind which other moralists have said belong not to her nature:

> A habit of attention exercises intellect, quickens discernment, multiplies ideas, enlarges the power of combining images and comparing characters, and gives a faculty of picking up improvement from circumstances the least promising . . .(84)

And since few women were in circumstances promising the opportunity of learning such skills, women need attention and initiative to educate themselves. If women are to improve their minds, they should really improve the *mind as a whole*, not just the moral sense; More thus transcends Chapone's text and the common association between women and sensibility.

Much of the misinterpretation of Hannah More's *Strictures* is based on the way in which the Victorian age made use of her doctrine of separate spheres. Maurice Quinlan in *Victorian Prelude* is partly correct in his estimation that "instead of lowering the barrier between the sexes," writers like More "insisted upon raising it still higher. Banished was the idea of equality with men" (143). With regards to social roles, yes, Hannah More raised the barrier between men and women, but not any higher than it was in Chapone's day. Actually, by making women's education more masculine, she lowered the barriers that existed between men's and women's minds and education. For More, the domestic and decorous barriers between men and women's functions serve as terms of reference for female identity and power, not their submission and weakness. They are borders of woman's own country in which she reigns -- although she is benevolently useful in the world at large, she still owns herself, and is as independent as a country can be without severing essential foreign ties. The idea of equality with men, disallowed in social roles, is not entirely banished: women are equal with men in their spirits and minds, and they have power and influence over men in moral and domestic realms. More's suggestion in the *Strictures* that women be involved in teaching and charitable work with the poor is criticized by Quinlan as a limitation on women's employment, when it was really an empowering innovation in her day. Quinlan also says that More "held no brief for the independent or assertive woman," because the heroine of *Coelebs* adheres to rules of propriety and modesty (150). As I have shown, in More's *Strictures*, female decorum is not superficial or hypocritical; it is coupled with rigorous mental development and a sense

of powerful moral influence. But the generation following Hannah More, with its new moral fashions, made it much easier for women to be empty shells of virtue. It no longer seemed revolutionary for women to live by More's standards. When society provides quick rewards to female heroines, there are no longer heroic challenges to overcome. The oppressive ways in which Victorians used the image of the Evangelical model female are not entirely to be blamed on Hannah More, who challenged women to exercise their mental and moral authority in her aggressive *Strictures on the Modern System of F· .ıle Education*.

Conclusion

Instead of challenging social hierarchies that seemed to have the authority of God behind them, moralists like Chudleigh, Chapone and More attempted to raise women's reputation for virtue and knowledge, and chiseled out new areas in women's subjective experience in their educational texts. It was a difficult task; the only avenues for women's action were moral, intellectual, and domestic, and these writers expanded them as much as they dared to. Because of their varied social contexts and personalities, their works exemplify a wide range of strategies. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Mary, Lady Chudleigh campaigned to raise the value of women's minds. Her *Essays on Several Subjects* draw on classical philosophy, current scientific and political metaphors, and the influences of Mary Astell and Richard Allestree. Rebelling against the materialism and idleness of her upper-class peers, Chudleigh proposed withdrawal and a search for better values through a classical, religious, and rational education. A virtuous learned lady would have been feared or envied, and she required an independent mind to survive. The mid-century moralist, Hester Chapone, was immured and encouraged by a circle of eminent moral figures such as Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson, and the bluestockings. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* educates young middle-class women in severe self-denial and piety according to the pattern of Richardson's heroines. While women could easily become discouraged with the elusiveness of the ideal, or become a hypocrite, Chapone taught that they could find self-esteem by honestly scaling the pedestal of female virtue, ensuring their souls were as pure as their conduct. In such a situation, Chapone's students required more fortitude than intelligence to reach perfection. At the end of the century, Hannah More, also influenced by Johnson and the bluestockings, breaks away from Chapone's risk-free pattern by becoming Evangelical and very self-assured in her role as moralist and polemicist in the wake of the French Revolution. She writes energetic strictures against the sensual and temporal lives of noblewomen, and argues that the mental strength of a woman is necessary for strong Christian virtue, a well-governed family, and healthy nation.

Eighteenth century Englishwomen, because they were largely excluded from male realms of knowledge and power, were therefore rendered more leisured, trivial, and useless. These women advocate a program to keep women's minds in action in spite of their exclusion, and thereby convince men that women are capable of more than is normally expected of them. Instead of rallying for an extended sphere, they aim to show women can be worthy and responsible with the cares already entrusted to them. For Chudleigh and More, men's monopoly of knowledge is unjust, for these women moralists see intellectual pursuits as the only tools to build human dignity and moral responsibility. They reduce women's triviality by ordering a diet of male knowledge and a strenuous exercise of reason. But the sheer power of will is Chapone's proof that women can be moral, can think (to a degree), can regulate their natures to achieve perfection. Though the allotted role of women is small, she encourages women to fill it to its limits without the appearance of effort. All of these women react with disgust to the idea of the lazy, vain, gossiping woman. Chudleigh simply tells women that trivial cares are not worth their time, are below their natural dignity. Chapone collects the weight of women's trivial faults and uses it to pressure them with guilt and fear. But More redirects women's tiny failures towards the possibility of just as many tiny successes, which could gradually improve the reputation of women and thus cause a moral shift in the domestic province and the country as a whole.

These three women also differ in the degrees to which they prefer the inner depth of a woman to her surface appearance and external behavior. To all of them, the display of and desire for wealth or political nobility, expressed through the traditional accomplishments of beauty, singing, dancing, painting or poetry, is associated with triviality, pride, and empty-headedness. By replacing aristocratic accomplishments with domestic and moral power, Hannah More still allows noblewomen the ability to shine and influence those aspiring young men. Elizabeth Hamilton wrote another conduct book for the daughter of a nobleman in 1806,[1] in which she allows a kind of display to coexist with inner depth:

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[1] Entitled *Letters: Addressed to the Daughter of a Nobleman on the Formation of Religious and Moral Principle.*

> By suggesting that a woman could have depth as well as surface, Mrs Hamilton argues that a woman could excel in both public and private spheres, that she could be the object of the gaze and still possess the subjective qualities required of a good wife and mother. (Armstrong 117)

Erasmus Darwin (whom Armstrong praises as a "notably liberal thinker") attempted, as Hannah More did, to unite the obedient and amiable manner with a robust mind and firm morality to form the perfect woman:

> Hence if to softness of manners, complacency of countenance, gentle unhurried motion, with a voice clear and yet tender, the charms which enchant all hearts can be superadded internal strength and activity of mind with a due sense of moral and religious obligation, all is attained which education can supply; the female character becomes compleat, excites our love and commands our admiration.[2]

Thus the passive deportment and active virtues work together, both "exciting" and "commanding" observers, and keeping enough distance from flattery and servility, as the word "admiration" implies.

The common flattery that women are by nature more religious than men is used to support the arguments of each of these women, although none of them believes it is true. Mary Chudleigh quietly assumes that men and women are composed exactly alike in their minds and souls and therefore have an equal advantage in religion. But she draws personal authority from the fact that women were freely allowed to write and speak about religion, and teach religion to other women. The Quaker idea that humans have an inner light, added to her rationalist bent, makes it possible that women, like men, can be directly inspired by God and therefore do not depend absolutely on books or people to tell them truths: a woman's enlightened conscience can be her highest court of judgment. In contrast, Hester Chapone feels the need to tell women exactly how to think and feel about God: while they are not naturally religious, everyone, including Chapone, thinks they should be, and therefore they have no excuse for not being so. The flattering notion of

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[2] Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (Dublin, 1798) p. 4. (As quoted in Armstrong, p. 119).

spiritual precedence is thus transformed into a command to conform. Like John Gregory, Chapone considers women's religion a matter of sentiment, not reason, and happily gives up intellectual territory for the fantastic empire of spirituality. But in the *Strictures*, a woman must exercise her reason; this is what abstracts her from the concerns of the body, and "helps to qualify her for religious pursuits" (114). Hannah More realizes that a woman's more susceptible nature can be both a benefit and a danger in religious matters, and thorough instruction in religion is required. She takes advantage of the power of the reputation of female piety, without sacrificing intellect, in order to make women the religious and moral instructors of men.[3] A woman's tendency to be more religious has given all of these women more public authority as teachers. But these writers ensure that in subjective experience, the pride of piety is nullified, for it may lead to moral inactivity.

These three authors also used religion in different ways. Chapone encourages her reader to adopt a sensible, liberal Christian sentiment that is moderate and tolerant, and able to please everyone. The fear of God's disapproval extends to include the fear of social disapproval, and the art of pleasing becomes one of a woman's prime religious duties. She has little concern for doctrine, and does not wish her students to evangelize, but to be amiable examples of sincere devotion to a God who is benevolent yet threatening. Chudleigh, on the other hand, sees religion bound up with principles of reason. Religion is not allied with social morality, for Chudleigh looks around her and sees injustice and foolishness. Through awakening her latent powers, a woman's mind can become enlightened about the true system of values. These values, she expects, will not conform to those held by the average man or woman, and will help a woman avoid succumbing to "the nauseous Flatteries and insipid Impertinencies of the Age" (*Essays* 254). Hannah More considers a deep understanding of religion both as a duty to self and to society. A woman should comprehend the doctrines of the God she loves, and reason

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[3] More's vision of the association between women and virtue had already come true by the time she wrote *Strictures*, according to Dale A. Johnson:

> over the course of the century women came to be regarded as preservers of religion in the home (traditionally the father's role) and urged to be visible models of faithfulness and piety. The contributions of William Law, James Fordyce, Hannah More, and others made the connection real in the minds of church people. (13)

should be used where possible to strengthen the authority of Biblical revelation; she should be more of a theologian than Chapone's pious woman.

In Hannah More's and Mary Chudleigh's opinion, learning is something that takes a very long time, a slow ascent, and great attention. It requires self-knowledge and humility, for a mind hungry for praise will seek for the immediate and more superficial pleasures, and even in studies will aim for show rather than solidity. Thus Chudleigh uses the myth of Icarus to warn those who attempt the heights too soon, and More compares the girl whose education consists of novels and letter-writing with the more serious and diligent woman. Chapone, on the other hand, offers half-measures of education to her student, because the constant pressures to perform disallow time for deep study. The more important education in the *Letters* is the study of self-regulation, which is a never-ending submission to difficult situations, with no rewards except the pride of being perfectly feminine and passively courageous -- and the right to teach younger women. For Chapone, intellectual humility means staying away from dangerous masculine subjects, and not studying too deeply. However, there is a danger in placing limits on female education, and even Chapone's mentor Samuel Richardson puts th. words in his hero Sir Charles Grandison's mouth:

> *Could* I point out the boundaries [to women's education], Charlotte, it might not to *some* spirits be proper: The limit might be treated as the one prohibited tree in the garden. But let me say, that genius, whether in man or woman, will push itself into light. If it has a laudable tendency, let it, as a ray of the Divinity, be encouraged, as well in the one Sex as in the other: I would not, by any means, have it limited: A little knowledge leads to vanity and conceit. (*Grandison* VI. lv. p. 251)

It could as easily be said after reading Chapone's *Letters* that vanity and conceit (and its dark side, the fear of censure) leads a woman to acquire only a little knowledge. But the slow and limitless ascent to real eminence, based on a "masculine" foundation, brings the reward of respect from others (including men) and an ever-increasing satisfaction with oneself, even in the absence of praise.

The degree of intellectual rigor in these educational works varies greatly. In style and rhetoric, and in their educational program for women, Chudleigh and More clearly outrun the conventional wisdom of Chapone. Chapone is ever stooping to motivate women with fear of censure, and nodding to the opinions of her contemporaries; the improvement of the mind is like the improvement of land in the eighteenth century: it proceeds by enclosure and private possession of formerly public grazing land. Her mental powers are bent toward learning duties and ingeniously adapting the self to them. Chudleigh wins the race if intellect is the standard, for while More submits intellect to revelation, Chudleigh sees no conflict at all between them, and learns from Classical sources without chiding herself for reading pagan authors. Chudleigh's mental capacities have no limits because they are entirely disconnected from social norms.

But if intellect is to be measured by its practical usefulness in the world, Hannah More deserves most praise. Her rhetoric is not merely enticing and uniquely contemplative like Chudleigh's, it is utterly military, for she is constantly aware of battling with the opinions of her male and female readers. While leading women to the joys of intellectual proficiency, she shows how women can distill their knowledge and direct their attention towards efficient household management, the instruction of their children, and ultimately, through an evangelistic kind of social conversation, to influence the politics and morals of the nation. Mary Chudleigh did not expect to influence many through her essays; they end in an essay on solitude.

The support and influence of a circle of women is the precondition of all of these texts. Mary Astell and a long line of historical learned ladies give Chudleigh the courage to become a poet and essayist, the bluestockings and Mrs. Montagu give Chapone their endorsement, and More has the constant support of her four sisters as well as her bluestocking friends. Chudleigh and More have a respectful sense of connection with the noblewomen in their audience as their equals, but Chapone condescends to advise and instruct a younger generation of the middle class, guiding them smoothly through the Bible and history, and stringently initiating them in the rituals of self-denial. In each text, the model of female friendship is based on virtue and proceeds by correction and education. In Chapone's text, however, the correction is unequal, imposed from the older

woman on the younger, built on the models of the husband's instruction of the wife, and the father-daughter relationship. But Chudleigh and More have a more equal ideal of friendship and therefore of marriage. Chudleigh and Allestree believe the wife should admonish her husband, and More desires women to instruct young men. More herself had men who admired her intellect; she dared to disobey ecclesiastical authority during the Blagdon controversy, and was considered a colleague in the Clapham sect.

Each of these texts has a different relationship to male authority as well. Chudleigh's preface sells her text to male and female readers through different strategies. She asserts that her essays are not for men's eyes, so that they are no longer an audience she feels responsible to. Yet nothing about her essays' subject matter limits them to one gender. In fact, throughout the essays she balances or effaces gendered ideas and historical figures. Socrates is a male authority whose presence pervades the text, but Chudleigh makes him into a benevolent guide and role model for herself and other women. In Chapone's *Letters*, the male authority is not so benevolent nor identified with the author. Chapone hides and softens masculine presence in her text as much as she can, but one is always aware of its surveillance. In her text, women should not be vain of their beauty or ornaments, because they are for pleasing men in particular, but the sensible man or benevolent God-like father is ever watching for signs of piety and virtue, which should be demurely performed for the sake of virtue and general sociability. Chapone takes a few risks when defending women from charges of natural weakness, but always makes sure women's virtues, even their courage and knowledge, are sufficiently feminine. The future husband of the pupil is veiled in mystery, but the reader is assured she will be rewarded with a good, sensible man if the conduct book directions are followed. More, on the other hand, is neither friendly with nor frightened of masculine readers: she wrestles with them. The ideas of Bennett appear in her text to lull inattentive men into thinking she agrees with him; but she insults him personally, and then laughs away the whole idea of arguing over male and female nature to earn "the poor precedence for a few short years" (199). In her preface she addresses women, but because of male readers, feels the need to prove she is not biased by her own gender. Likely for the same reasons, she purposefully makes a great noise over her ridicule of Wollstonecraft's political pretensions. Because of

potential male readers, none of these three but More is bold enough to dare to propose that women should teach men and thus indirectly affect politics.

In the age of Chudleigh, Chapone, and More, feminism was largely non-political. Wollstonecraft was ostracized for being even moderately political, and respectable women preferred to read Hannah More. No matter how aware these women were of the material and ideological bases of their subordinate roles, they interpreted social evils in a moral and religious framework. Political and economic considerations lie beyond the margins of their texts, and are merely one of the quiet assumptions behind the need for women's moral advice. Nancy Armstrong writes,

> Although a female genre, often written by women and directed at female readers, conduct books of the eighteenth and nineteenth century -- or for that matter, earlier female conduct books -- were attuned to the economic interests that they designated as the domain of the male. (Armstrong 135)

Women authors surely knew when they were trespassing on male territory, but the wiser ones stepped lightly and made no enemies. This is obvious in Chapone, whose text reminds us constantly of social surveillance. Hannan More's facility with language enables her to disguise a few revolutionary ideas in religious garb, and to mitigate the discouraging effects of male prejudices through irony and balance, even while she includes them in her text. Attempting to avoid any details of her social and political world, even Chudleigh leaves behind recognizable markers of her *Essays*' context through her metaphors, autobiography, and utopian fantasies. But women moralists believed they could effect significant change in their lives without referring overtly to the world of men.

Some feminists believe that subjective adjustments to women's lives are unreal and invalid measures. Judith Hawley, for example, speaking of Jane Collier, writes

> it would be anachronistic to describe her as a feminist because, unlike Wollstonecraft and the other radicals of the 1790s, she does not suggest social change as precondition for the improvement of women's lot. (xviii)

Thus the separation of domestic and public spheres, in its Victorian manifestation, is an idea that many feminists consider the bane of women's freedom. But in the eighteenth century the borders between men's and women's worlds served as markers of identity and personal territory, and could be empowering as well as limiting. Most eighteenth-century women who considered themselves feminist would have never bothered to lift a pen if they believed that the only true improvement of their lot depended on changing external conditions *first*. Chudleigh and More assume that worthwhile change arises from internal experience and attitude, and that social and political trends are merely surface manifestations of these in aggregate. They reform from an internal and transcendent standard of virtue. Chudleigh's utopias are based on this model, as well as More's notion of women's moral influence. By making women governors of their households and England's morality, More actually widens women's power beyond Astell's hope that "our only endeavour shall be to be absolute Monarchs in our own Bosoms" (*Proposal I* 179). She contributed to the formation of a subjective feminine self within and through the confines of domesticity.

However, Chapone's proposed adjustments to women's minds only internalize the expectations imposed from outside themselves, and therefore her education actually does make her pupils inert, walking conduct-books. Armstrong's criticism of false subjectivity applies to Chapone's *Letters*:

> Such handbooks still offer the power of self-transformation. The illusion persists that there is a self independent of the material conditions that have produced it and that such a self can transform itself without transforming the social and economic configuration in opposition to which it is constructed. This transformational power still seems to arise from within the self and to effect upon that self through strategies of self-discipline, the most perfect realization of which is perhaps anorexia nervosa. (Armstrong 135)

Chapone's anorexic desire to fit into her moral corset is truly an illusion of self-transformation. But her mistake is not that she disbelieves in social change, but that she does not believe enough in the powerful defining role of women's intellect. She cannot

even imagine a better, freer life beyond Clarissa's. More and Chudleigh, like anyone born within a "social and economic configuration," begin by learning all they can, and then suggest improvements, both subjective and social. Their texts may invoke a fictional subjectivity, but they still have the power of fiction and rhetoric. Armstrong wisely admits this power:

> the rhetoric of the conduct books produced a subject who in fact had no material body at all. This rhetoric replaced the material body with a metaphysical body made largely of words, albeit words constituting a material form of power in their own right. (Armstrong 136)

More and Chudleigh put the "*Embrio's* of Science, the first Rudiments of Virtue, the Beginnings of all useful *Knowledge*" in women's minds, and have faith that women can gradually find virtuous ways to make the existing hierarchies more benevolent or more bearable for themselves (Chudleigh, *Essays* 255).

Another way in which Chudleigh and More are alike is in their use of geographical and political metaphors for the mind and the two sexes. By using these figures they rhetorically adopt the male roles of scientist, geographer, historian, and economist. When Chudleigh says women must "put in for a Share" of the "Goods of the Understanding," (*Essays* 251) she places men and women on an equal playing field; a similar equalizing effect is created by More's ideas of the male and female countries under the same parallel, sharing similar land features on adjacent shores. Chapone uses an agricultural metaphor to express the improvement of the soul. "Human nature," not just female nature, "has in it the seeds of every vice, as well as of every virtue," and requires continual vigilance to destroy the tiny sprigs of evil (53). Vigilance is important in Chudleigh's country of self, to keep civil war from breaking out between the passions and the reason, and in More's metaphors, women must always be on the watch, like soldiers, to defend their domestic and national territory from disorder and French influence. All women express the need for self-examination and some form of moral diligence, but Chapone's harvest of virtue is rendered as tribute, while Chudleigh is a consumer of the goods of the understanding.

Armstrong posits that as the century continued, women's virtue and education were more and more limited to their usefulness to the household and, implicitly, their usefulness to men:

> If the female's abstract virtues endowed the duties of the housewife with value, the spiritual virtues honoured in earlier courtesy literature became limited in how they might help her perform her practical duties. Once female virtue became so linked to work, conduct books banished from the ideal woman the features that had once seemed desirable because they enhanced the aristocratic woman. (Armstrong 105-6)

If this statement is true of most conduct books for women, it is not true of Hannah More's *Strictures*. While Hester Chapone certainly limits abstract virtues to those which strengthen social duties, Hannah More gives women wide intellectual and religious pasture, of which only a small percentage shall actually be used in domestic affairs. Education is to issue as conduct in the *Strictures*, but not before it has benefited the woman's mind and soul. More's attack on women's literary ambitions (their hunger for flattery) in order to focus on usefulness and duty is not necessarily evidence of what Armstrong considers a "prevalent tendency toward anti-intellectualism", it is More's effort to balance a woman's intellectual and religious freedom with the need for social survival (Armstrong 106).

Hester Chapone and Hannah More, while they consider household management an important manifestation of virtue, devote only part of their texts to this subject. Chapone's ideal of perpetual economic service to the husband gives women virtuous pride but provides little else for the self to live on. Hannah More makes domestic management an active, rational employment rather than a matter of sacrifice and obedience. Chudleigh, in a category by herself, altogether scorns to curtsy to the "economic interests" of male and female. Both the upper-class vice of mercenary marriages and the middle ranks' "sordid" arts of "scraping dirt together" to get rich are repudiated -- she even rebukes the clergy for the "Golden Calf" in their hearts (*Essays* 366, 374). Chudleigh holds herself above such mean considerations as home economics. If these books, as part of a literary

institution of women's education, contributed towards the rise of the middle class, or the development of a suffocating Victorian morality, it was a consequence far beyond their avowed intentions.

By my serendipitous choice of these particular authors, it seems that Hannah More combines the intellectual rigor of Chudleigh with the sociable, amiable self-denial of Chapone. More thus avoids both of the pitfalls of the two previous educationalists: Chudleigh's withdrawal from society, and Chapone's complete immersion in it. Chudleigh raises a high barrier between herself and any person who believes differently about women and virtue; she is almost indifferent to social criticism, and feeds on the pure air of philosophy and religion. Chapone breaks all barriers whatsoever between a woman's self and the social world; woman must conform, assimilate, and weed out any part of self which is offensive to those whom she hopes to please: God and mankind. By a unique innovation, adding domesticity to the virtuous learned lady, Hannah More stretches her borders to preside over a larger realm than Chudleigh's. Chapone does not know where her will ends and society's demands begin, but More's borders both strengthen and crucially limit a woman's sense of self. They insulate women from trespassers on their mental and domestic territory, and the domestic wall just happens to be acceptable and useful to society as well. Each of the three women moralists has a different degree of separation from social opinions, different levels of intellectual rigor, and has her own proposal for women's education. This study illustrates that within the genre of women's advice to women in the eighteenth century, wide differences exist on essential issues. As well, it is encouraging to notice that despite the restrictive norms of female conduct and education, even politically and morally conservative women used rhetoric and the tools of their culture to construct a realm of selfhood and dignity for Englishwomen.

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