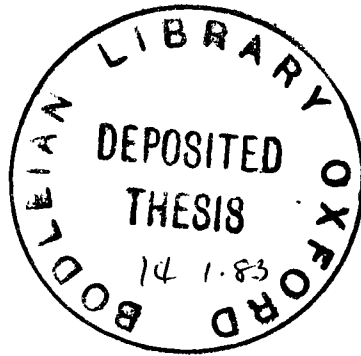


Minor women novelists and their presentation of a feminine ideal, 1744-1800; with special reference to Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Brooke, Elizabeth Griffith, Harriet Lee, Clara Reeve, Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane West.



A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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From the 1740s to 1800 there was a great increase both in the output of novels, and the number of women novelists. At the same time, an idealized view of femininity was prevailing in society. The relationship between these two features of eighteenth-century life helps us to assess the contribution of some eighteenth-century women to the development of the novel.

In this period women's novels show some distinctive features, particularly in their portrayal of women. The idealized eighteenth-century view of women saw them as naturally virtuous, chaste, and full of the sensibility which was increasingly seen as an important positive quality. Therefore an idealized woman is the central figure in many sentimental novels. This idealized figure, used especially by women novelists, is of ambiguous significance. She raises women's status by demonstrating female superiority, but does so by modesty and submissiveness, qualities which eighteenth-century feminists perceived as inimical to women's emancipation. Women's novels often contain contradictions between explicit support of female emancipation, and idealized portraits of submissive heroines.

Chapter 1 discusses the reasons for the rise of the woman novelist. Chapter 2 discusses her role and the reviewers' part in defining that role. Chapter 3 discusses women novelists in relation to feminism. The following chapters focus on particular writers. Sarah Fielding is a didactic writer with a certain feminist consciousness. The novels of Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith epitomize the idealization of the heroine. The comic attack on the heroine is described with reference to Charlotte Lennox's work. The relationship between sentimentalism, didacticism and feminism is studied with reference to Clara Reeve and Harriet Lee. Chapter 8 introduces the 1790s, when politics dominates fiction and sentimentalism is attacked, and chapters on Jane West, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Charlotte Smith suggest the variety of women novelists' responses to these developments.

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List of Abbreviations Used

- DNB - Dictionary of National Biography
ELH - English Literary History
HLQ - Huntington Library Quarterly
JEGP - Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLN - Modern Language Notes
MLQ - Modern Language Quarterly
PMLA - Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ - Philological Quarterly
RES - Review of English Studies

PART ONE : THE WOMAN NOVELIST, 1744-1800.

CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF THE WOMAN NOVELIST

Early in the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott remarked on "the number of highly-talented women, who have, within our time of novel-reading, distinguished themselves advantageously in this department of literature". After naming as examples Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliffe, and several other women novelists, he added his opinion that "it would be impossible to match against these names the same number of masculine competitors, arising within the same space of time". Why this should be so was "a subject which would lead us far", he remarked.¹ It can certainly lead us into a consideration of the numerous minor women novelists of the late eighteenth century. In the second half of the eighteenth century a great increase in the number of novels produced, and the development of the sentimental novel, coincides with a remarkable increase in the number of women novelists. At the same time, women's position in society is a subject of much discussion, and certain images of ideal womanhood are becoming popular. The novels of the second half of the eighteenth century reflect the age's concern with defining women's role, and women novelists in particular tend to make women the centre of their work. This study of minor women novelists and their treatment of the theme of womanhood is intended to describe the development of women's writing in the context of the

¹"Charlotte Smith", first published in Miscellaneous Prose Works, 1827, iv; rpt. in Ioan Williams, ed., Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1968), p. 190.

developing tradition of the novel, of sentimentalism, and of late-eighteenth-century ideas about women. It is hoped that this will throw some light on the literary tradition which leads up to the major achievements of Burney, Edgeworth and Austen, and some suggestions will be made as to the reasons for, and the implications of, women's emergence as some of the most important figures in the history of the novel.

Although the presence of a number of women among the novelists of the period from the 1740s to the end of the eighteenth century has often been the subject of general comment, most of the minor women novelists of the time have received little close study. As Elaine Showalter remarks, "[h]aving lost sight of the minor novelists, who were the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next, we have not had a very clear understanding of the continuities in women's writing".¹ There are some studies of the minor women novelists. J.M.S. Tompkins provides a very useful discussion of women writers towards the end of the century in her study of the popular novel.² More detailed, but perhaps less perceptive discussions are found in works by J.M. Horner and B.G. MacCarthy.³ J.R. Foster discusses some of the minor women writers in his study of the pre-romantic novel.⁴ The most thorough and illuminating study

¹A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing (Princeton, 1977; rpt. London: Virago Press, 1978), p. 7.

²The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (1932; rpt. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1962).

³J.M. Horner, "The English Women Novelists and their Connection with the Feminist Movement (1688-1797)", Smith College Studies in Modern Languages 11 (1929-30), nos. 1, 2, and 3; B.G. MacCarthy, The Later Women Novelists 1744-1818 (Cork: Cork University Press, 1947).

⁴History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England (1949; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966).

of the minor women novelists of the middle and late eighteenth century is Philippe Séjourné's, which discusses the achievements and the limitations of the women novelists in terms of women's social position in eighteenth-century England.¹ By concentrating on the common elements in the women novelists' treatment of their themes, however, Séjourné tends to underestimate two important aspects of women's writing in the eighteenth century -- the many differences between mid- and late-eighteenth-century novels, and the differences between individual writers in style, theme and attitude. My study is an attempt to combine general discussion of women's writing in the late eighteenth century with close study of the distinctive contributions of a number of individual writers.

Eighteenth-century writers frequently commented on the unprecedented increase in the number of women novelists. "This branch of the literary trade [novel-writing] appears, now, to be almost entirely engrossed by the Ladies", complained the Monthly Review in 1773.² Statistical evidence of women's authorship in this period is hard to obtain, especially as so many works were published anonymously, but what evidence we have suggests that women were producing a significant proportion of novels. F.G. Black estimates that between two-thirds and three-quarters of epistolary novels in the period 1760-1790 were written by women.³ Maurice Lévy estimates that from 1764 to 1824, female

¹Aspects généraux du roman féminin en Angleterre de 1740 à 1800 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications des Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1966).

²Monthly Review 48 (1773), 154.

³The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century: A Descriptive and Bibliographical Study (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1940), p. 8.

Gothic novelists outnumbered male by nine to one.¹ This estimate may be too high, and there is no definite evidence in favour of the suggestion noted by Robert Halsband, "that most of the fiction published in the eighteenth century was written by women".² However, it is reasonable to suppose that 'in the second half of the eighteenth century, more women in England were writing for publication than ever before, and that their efforts were concentrated on the novel.

Why were women writers so closely connected to the novel? The answer lies in eighteenth-century social changes which affected the role of women and of fiction. The movement towards capitalization of the economy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries meant that many jobs like baking, spinning and weaving, traditionally done by women in the home, were now done by men in workshops. During the eighteenth century men entered and threatened to take over many traditional female trades, such as millinery. As women's employment opportunities dwindled, they became more dependent on men to provide their support.³ A woman's need to obtain a husband and to avoid seduction, which would ruin her on the marriage market, became more urgent.

¹Le roman "gothique" anglais 1764-1824 (Toulouse: Association des publications de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Toulouse, 1968), p. 150.

²"'The Female Pen': Women and Literature in Eighteenth-Century England", History Today 24 (1974), 706.

³Women protested about this situation. Mary Ann Radcliffe, for example, complained of men milliners, mantua-makers, staymakers and hairdressers, and argued that prostitution arose because women were "precluded from supporting themselves by means of some lawful employment". The Female Advocate; or An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation (London: Vernor and Hood, 1799), p. 44.

The changes in the economy also meant more leisure, at least for the wives and daughters of middle-class families. Middle-class girls were more likely to be sent to boarding school, where a superficial education prepared them not for work, but for the search for a husband.¹ It is not surprising that these young women, literate and leisured, formed a high proportion of the readership of the novel, that new literary form aimed at a middle-class audience. Moreover, this female readership had an effect on the development of the typical concerns of the novel's plot -- a young woman's fortunes in love, courtship and marriage. Obtaining a husband had become the business of a young woman's life, and the preoccupation of her leisure hours.

There were more women novelists for many of the same reasons as there were more women readers. A form considered suitable for a female reader was likely to be attempted by a female writer. To many women it must have seemed an easy step from reading novels to writing them, because the novel was a new genre with no established tradition, and could be attempted by women without classical education. Moreover, the very social changes which gave women the opportunity to read and write novels, also provided pressing reasons for some women to become writers. It is probable that some of the women who in previous times would have exercised the old female trades turned to the new trade of writing in the eighteenth century. Middle-class women who could not afford the new middle-class leisure, either because they

¹James Pellor Malcolm reported that in 1759, "every description of tradesmen sent their children to be instructed, not in the useful attainments necessary for humble life, but the arts of coquetry and self-consequence — in short, those of a young lady". Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth Century (2nd ed. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), I, 328.

lacked male support, or because they needed to help support their families, often turned to the literary market. Writing offered the possibility of earning money to a class of women barred from the professions by their sex and from trade and domestic service by their gentility. It became in effect a substitute in the middle classes for the disappearing home industries.

The relation between women and the novel is also affected by the widespread change in attitudes to women, which results in the establishment of a distinctive eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. This in itself can be seen as one of the results of the change in women's economic and social role in the century. Ruth H. Bloch, in an article on the roots of modern sex roles, links changes in eighteenth-century social organization to an emerging ideology of femininity. The modern history of sex roles, she argues, shows a pattern of alternation between a stress on the similarities between the sexes, and a stress on the differences between them. In the English and American middle classes of the seventeenth century, she finds an emphasis on the qualitative similarities between men and women. Female inferiority was seen "more as a matter of degree than of kind",¹ and she suggests that women "were measured against essentially the same standard as men and were judged worthy of a position one rung beneath". In the eighteenth century on the other hand, she finds more emphasis on the different qualities of the sexes. There is a new emphasis on sexual polarization: "Male and

¹"Untangling the Roots of Modern Sex Roles: A Survey of Four Centuries of Change", in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 4 no. 2 (Winter, 1978), 238.

female imagery and activities became more distinct and increasingly associated with contrasting 'rational' and 'affective' styles. This process of sexual differentiation closely corresponded to the progressive divergence of science and art, state and church, work and home".¹ As a result, "women increasingly gained ascendancy in the sacred, moral, and emotional spheres of life: religious benevolence, sentimental fiction, and the family".²

This gain in ascendancy can be illustrated from seventeenth and eighteenth-century comments on women. In 1696, a feminist writer felt it necessary to ask "whether the time an ingenious Gentleman spends in the Company of Women, may justly be said to be misemploy'd, or not?"³ She went on to argue that women could be valuable companions to men. By the middle of the eighteenth century these arguments had become commonplace, and every book on female conduct stressed that women's special qualities made them ideal companions for men, capable of reforming men's manners by their very presence. A typical remark is found in James Fordyce's popular Sermons To Young Women, where he writes:

¹Bloch, p. 245.

²Bloch, p. 246.

³An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (London: A. Roper and E. Wilkinson, and R. Clavel, 1696), p. 6.

How often have I seen a company of men who were disposed to be riotous, checked all at once into decency by the accidental entrance of an amiable woman; while her good sense and obliging deportment charmed them into at least a temporary conviction, that there is nothing so beautiful as female excellence, nothing so delightful as female conversation in its best form!¹

With this idea of women's value as companions went a new praise of marriage, and the social historian Lawrence Stone describes the eighteenth century as a time of rising emotional expectation from marriage. Companionship was increasingly considered an important aspect of marriage.² James Fordyce's description of woman as ideal companion shows how in the eighteenth century this image of womanhood was seen to replace an older view which underestimated women's contribution to society. Fordyce criticizes the "illiberal supposition" of those who believe women created only to "divert fancy, to gratify desire, and in general to be a sort of better servants",³ and gives his own view of women's role:

They were manifestly intended to be the mothers and formers of a rational and immortal offspring; to be a kind of softer companions, who, by nameless delightful sympathies and endearments, might improve our pleasures and soothe our pains; to lighten the load of our domestic cares, and thereby leave us more at leisure for rougher labours, or severer studies; and finally, to spread a certain grace and embellishment over human life.⁴

¹Sermons To Young Women 3rd ed. (London: A. Millar and T. Cadell, J. Dodsley, and J. Payne, 1766), I, 21.

²See The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977), Part 3, Chapter 8, "Companionate Marriage".

³Fordyce, I, 207.

⁴Fordyce, I, 208.

Though Fordyce offers his description as a reflection of his enlightened view of women, he clearly places women as men's dependants and confines them to a domestic role. The praise of women's virtues found throughout eighteenth-century literature helps define a similar role. The qualities praised are all suited to a female role of domestic life, dependence on men, and preoccupation with love and marriage. Women's natural delicacy, tenderness and modesty are praised. Their vulnerability and need of masculine protection is emphasized. Female chastity is important, and women's delicacy is considered to incline them to be chaste. From women's "softness and sensibility of heart"¹ all their virtues are to be expected.

It is in the novel that this preoccupation with women and female virtue is most fully expressed. The large number of eponymous heroines in eighteenth-century English novels demonstrates the close connection of the new genre with an interest in female characters. Defoe's Moll Flanders (1722) and Roxana (1724), Richardson's Pamela (1740) and Clarissa (1748), and Burney's Evelina (1778), Cecilia (1782) and Camilla (1796), are examples of the novel as the history of a woman's life, and many less well-known writers published novels with a similar focus of interest on the heroine. Such novels focus on the heroine's problems in love, usually on her attempt to make a romantically and socially acceptable marriage and to avoid the pitfalls of seduction or a loveless match. Even Defoe's novels centre on the sexual lives of his heroines. The heroine-centred novel gives women a new importance in literature, but by

¹John Gregory, A Father's Legacy To His Daughters (Dublin: Thomas Ewing, and Caleb Jenkin, 1774), p. 13.

assuring women that romantic love and marriage are the only important parts of their lives, it can condition women to accept their exclusion from the labour market and their dependence on men.

For women writers, as well as readers, the novel of love and courtship offered both opportunities and restrictions. The centrality of female characters to the novel is encouraged by the practice of women novelists, who made use of this chance to write of subjects, like a woman's domestic life or a young girl's entry into society, which were within their experience, and on which they could claim to have a special authority. Fanny Burney described Evelina, one of the most widely-acclaimed novels of the period, as a work arising from a narrow female experience. The novel's full title is Evelina: or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World, and Burney commented, "this may seem a rather bold attempt and title for a female whose knowledge of the world is very confined . . . I have not pretended to show the world what it actually is, but what it appears to a girl of seventeen:- and so far as that, surely any girl who is past seventeen may safely do?"¹ Such a formula meant that the novel could be attempted by any woman writer, but it also suggested a very narrow scope for her work.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, sentimentalism played an important part, both in continuing the tradition of women's centrality to the novel, and in establishing the novel as a form especially suited to the woman

¹Diary entry, March 1778; in Annie Raine Ellis ed., The Early Diary of Frances Burney 1768-1778 (1889: rpt. London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), II, 212.

writer. Eighteenth-century sensibility is a complex idea, owing much to philosophical investigations. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), which derives all human knowledge from experience gained through the senses, has been suggested as a seminal influence on eighteenth-century ideas about sensibility.¹ For the eighteenth century Locke's ideas imply that the evidence of the senses can be relied upon in making moral judgments. In eighteenth-century thought morality is to be derived from human feelings. Hume finds that sentiment, "a feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery", is as necessary as reason for the development of a moral sense.² Connected to speculation on the origin of the moral sense is the view that virtue is natural to mankind.³ Hartley uses the doctrine of the association of ideas to argue that "there is . . . such a Thing as pure disinterested Benevolence".⁴ By the late eighteenth century, philosophical ideas on sensation, sentiment and morality are absorbed, in simplified form, into the general consciousness. The idea that virtue is natural and is demonstrated by sensibility is found in hundreds of popular novels.

¹See especially G.S. Rousseau, "Nerves, Spirits and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility", in Studies in the Eighteenth Century III, ed. R.F. Brissenden and J.C. Eade (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), pp. 137-157.

²Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751); in Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 286.

³This view is already expressed in the late seventeenth century by Latitudinarian divines. See R.S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'", ELH 1 (1934), 205-30.

⁴Observations on Man (London, 1749; rpt. Gainsville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), I, 474.

The concept of sensibility enters novels in various ways. The idea that only the individual's senses could be the basis for moral decisions means that a certain disregard for the conventions of society may be condoned in a character who is good at heart. Indeed, society is often criticized for being hostile to the sentimental individual. The pleasures of benevolence are extolled in many novels. By aiding the poor and sympathizing with other people's sorrows, the sentimental protagonists prove their sensibility. Sentimental protagonists are characters who feel sensations more acutely than ordinary people. Their possession of a feeling heart makes them virtuous, but it also makes them vulnerable to painful sensations. Sentimental heroes and heroines, it has been noted, "being virtuous . . . are somehow necessarily weak".¹

The eighteenth-century concept of sensibility is clearly related in many ways to the new image of womanhood being created at the same time. Some aspects are more closely linked than others. The sentimentalist's trust in his or her own instincts is not compatible with the much-praised feminine modesty and decorum. However, the sentimentalist's acute feelings, delicate perceptions, and tendency to be helpless and passive, are all considered particularly feminine in the eighteenth century. As sentimental and feminine qualities so frequently coincide, it is fitting that many

¹R.F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 91.

sentimental protagonists are women. Women have become particularly representative of one of the most important ideas of the age, and this is one reason why, in the eighteenth century, "the literary tradition moves to examining female experience as a revealingly intense version of human experience in general".¹

Because of this link between ideas of sensibility and femininity, many women place emphasis on their own sensibility, as their diaries and letters show. In 1768 Fanny Burney reports her stepmother's remark on her: "Here's a girl will never be happy! Never while she lives! -- for she possesses perhaps as feeling a heart as ever girl had!"² About twenty years later, Mary Wollstonecraft tells her sister, "You know not my dear Girl of what materials, this strange inconsistency [sic] heart of mine, is formed and how alive it is to tenderness and misery".³ Perhaps the clearest and most detailed picture of a woman who internalizes the eighteenth-century concept of feminine sensibility is found in the letters of Anna Seward. In a letter of 1764 she attributes to herself "imagination . . . sensibility, and warm disdain of every grovelling propensity".⁴

¹J.J. Richetti, "The Portrayal of Women in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Literature", in Marlene Springer, ed., What Manner of Woman: Essays on English and American Life and Literature (New York, 1977; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 67.

²The Early Diary of Frances Burney, I, 8.

³Letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, May 11, 1787; in Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft ed. R.M. Wardle (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 151.

⁴The Swan of Lichfield, being a Selection from the Correspondence of Anna Seward ed. Hesketh Pearson (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1936), p. 42.

After her sister Sarah's death in June 1764 she reflects on men's relative lack of sensibility. She thinks and talks all the time of Sarah, never tired of this "heart-affecting theme", but, she adds, "I am afraid that men in general feel little of all this".¹ The late eighteenth-century sentimentalist turned to contemplating the sublime, and at Scarborough in 1793 Anna Seward shows her "rage for the terrific" by going alone at night to the promontory to watch the waves during a storm.² Her imagination, she writes in 1796, has "ever been prone to dwell . . . on the solemn, the grand, the sublime".³ In the same year she writes that her beauty has faded, but her sensibility remains. "I can believe what I am told about my countenance expressing the feelings of my heart", she declares.⁴

All the sentimental qualities claimed by Anna Seward are attributed to sentimental heroines in this period and become part of the late eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. These ideas about women affect women writers' own view of

¹The Swan of Lichfield, p. 53 and p. 54.

²The Swan of Lichfield, p. 149.

³To Miss Ponsonby, March 23, 1796; in Letters of Anna Seward (Edinburgh: Printed by George Ramsay and Company, for Archibald Constable and Company, Edinburgh; and Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, William Miller, and John Murray, London, 1811), IV, 192.

⁴To Mrs. T--, March 2, 1796; in Letters of Anna Seward, IV, 173.

themselves, and encourage them to write a particular type of novel. If women's feelings are more tender and delicate than men's, it follows that the kind of novel most adapted to their self-expression is the sentimental. Eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century writers comment on women's aptitude for sentimental writing. A.L. Barbauld writes that comedy is suited to the stronger masculine spirit, while men are less able than women to express melancholy sentiment, because men's emotions are "more transiently felt, and with fewer modifications of delicacy".¹ Women's tender sentiments are a sufficient explanation, to eighteenth-century critics, of women novelists' preference for the epistolary love-story. "Love, the first sentiment that enters the heart of the fair, is the first subject of their correspondence", writes one reviewer.² Sentimentalism encourages the use of women as central characters, and women's particularly sentimental qualities mean that they are considered better at writing novels centred on women. Henry Fielding writes that female characters are better "when drawn by sensible Writers of their own Sex, who are on this Subject much more capable, than the ablest of ours".³ The sentimental tradition combined with new ideas of femininity gives women writers the opportunity for a new prominence in literature.

¹"On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing", in A.L. Barbauld, ed., The British Novelists; with an Essay, and Prefaces Biographical and Critical New ed. Volume I (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, et al, 1820), p. 42.

²Review of The School for Daughters: or, the History of Miss Charlotte Sidney, in Monthly Review, 52 (1775), 505.

³Preface to Sarah Fielding's Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple (London: A. Millar, 1747), I, xvii.

Again, however, we see that women novelists were restricted at the same time as they took new opportunities. Woman's role as the representative of purity and morality, which was increasingly important in the late eighteenth century, was a very significant factor in the development of a "feminine" type of novel. Excluded from large areas of masculine experience by their social role, and prohibited from mentioning any subject deemed incompatible with new standards of feminine delicacy, women were unable to write picaresque novels. Instead they concentrated on the sentimental novel, to which in many cases they added a new didactic emphasis.

It is evident, then, that general distinctions between men's and women's novels in the late eighteenth century can be made. The differences are not due to natural female qualities, as contemporary critics assumed, but to developments in women's social role and in the ideology of womanhood in the period.

In general, it can be said that minor female novelists of the period tend to imitate Richardson and write in the sentimental tradition, while minor male novelists tend to imitate Fielding and Smollett and to make use of the picaresque tradition. J.M.S. Tompkins describes Charles Jenner, John Chater, Richard Graves and Herbert Lawrence as followers of Fielding.¹ John Shebbeare imitated both Fielding and

¹Tompkins, p. 38.

Smollett.¹ Nearly all minor female novelists of the period show the influence of Richardson's work. The division is not clear-cut. Fielding and Smollett also provided inspiration for women writers. Sarah Fielding's works show many of her brother's characteristics, though noticeably not those censured by Richardson and Johnson as immoral. Fanny Burney produced grotesque descriptions in Smollett's fashion in Evelina. Men also wrote very sentimental novels, especially after the appearance of Sterne's work. Henry Mackenzie, Henry Brooke, Courtney Melmoth and Edward Bancroft are all sentimental novelists. Hugh Kelly's Louisa Mildmay (1767) is a sentimental novel owing much to Richardson's work. We can say, however, that women novelists tended more than men towards a certain type of novel in the eighteenth century, that they were more exclusively concerned with the love-story, that they tended to keep to certain standards of decorum, and that their moral purpose was often heavily emphasized.

Although most modern critics of eighteenth-century novels find differences between men's and women's writing similar to those outlined above, they do not always conclude from this that women make a distinctive contribution to the eighteenth-century novel. Pierre Fauchery, in his study of the European novel of this period, finds certain characteristics typical of women novelists. He writes that they

¹See J.R. Foster, History of the Pre-Romantic Novel, p.88.

tend to identify with their heroines, that their novels are often close to autobiography, that they rarely explore the consciousness of men, and that their attitude to men is sometimes hostile. Despite these special characteristics he believes that it is not, on the whole, useful to separate the study of women's novels from those of men. This is because he considers that the myth of feminine destiny which he finds central to eighteenth-century novels is created by men, and adopted by women without significant changes. Eighteenth-century women novelists, he finds, are imitators rather than innovators: "Nous verrons en effet qu'au XVIII^e siècle, les mythes de la destinée féminine, de fabrique masculine, sont le plus souvent reçus tels quels par les romancières. Celles-ci, en outre, bien loin de revendiquer leur autonomie, s'abritent hautement derrière l'autorité des grands écrivains de l'autre sexe".¹ Women writers of this time are often considered as imitators. Mario Praz considers women Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth century as imitators, writing that Ann Radcliffe and other women novelists of her day "adopted the persecuted woman as a character; but there may be nothing more in this than another of the many manifestations of feminine imitativeness. As the literary tradition has been the

¹Pierre Fauchery, La destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle 1713-1807: Essai de gynécomythie romanesque (Université de Lille III: Service de Reproduction des Theses, 1972), p. 93.

monopoly of man, at any rate up till the present, it is natural that women writers should slavishly adopt in their works the masculine point of view".¹

Such a description of eighteenth-century women writers exaggerates their debt to a masculine tradition. It is true that women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century are greatly influenced by the work of Richardson. His novels are so influential, however, precisely because they are largely written from a woman's point of view. The world of Pamela is presented through its heroine's consciousness, and Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison, though they contain a much greater diversity of points of view, make important explorations into the psychology of their heroines and other female characters. Much of Richardson's interest in woman's role was fostered by his friendship with women and his reading of women novelists. Richardson's biographers point out that he had little knowledge of the classics, and was not widely read in English literature, but that he did read the women novelists of his day.² He corresponded at length with

¹The Romantic Agony trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 113.

²See T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, Samuel Richardson: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 569 and p. 584.

friends like Lady Bradshaigh, Susanna Highmore, Hester Mulso, and Jane and Margaret Collier, on the subject of women's rights and duties. The growth of his circle of female friends between the publishing of Pamela in 1740 and Clarissa in 1748 may account in part for the introduction of long discussions of this topic in the later novel.

Richardson's work can also be seen as part of a tradition already deeply influenced by women writers. Pamela, the story, told by the heroine, of her rise in the world after threats to her honour, bears resemblances to Marivaux's Marianne, though it is not known if Richardson read the French writer's work. The tradition of a fiction which centred on a woman and explored her consciousness and motivations had been established in France much earlier, by Madame de la Fayette in La Princesse de Clèves, which Richardson is known to have read.¹

H.K. Miller traces a line of development from the French romances of the seventeenth century, many of them written by women, to the she-tragedies of the early eighteenth century, and to the novels of Mary Delarivière Manley and Eliza Haywood. These last two, he adds, influenced Richardson.² J.J. Richetti in Popular Fiction Before

¹See Eaves and Kimpel, p. 583.

²"Augustan Prose Fiction and the Romance Tradition", in Studies in the Eighteenth Century III, p. 246.

Richardson has considered the importance of Haywood, Manley, Penelope Aubin, Jane Barker and Elizabeth Rowe in establishing fictional conventions before the 1740s. The heroine-centred novel of the late eighteenth century should not be considered to originate with Richardson, whose work was then copied by a large number of female writers. The picture is a more complex one, and the 'Richardsonian' novel should rather be considered as the product of a long tradition of fictional investigation of feminine psychology, to which women had made many of the earliest contributions.

Many women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century were influenced not only by Richardson but by French novelists. Charlotte Lennox's Female Quixote (1752) uses material from French salon romances. Frances Brooke's novels are strongly influenced by those of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni. Marivaux, Prévost, d'Arnaud, and Rousseau influence many novelists in the sentimental tradition. The novel tradition was built up by a pattern of such influences, but the women novelists were by no means passive imitators in this process. Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron, for example, marks an important departure in the Gothic novel, linking the Gothic to a bourgeois social world and discarding much of its mystery in favour of a new didactic tone. Sophia Lee's

The Recess (1785) is influenced by Prévost, but shows its originality in its creation of a world in which female characters move in an atmosphere of constant fear and uncertainty, an atmosphere which influenced Ann Radcliffe's creation of a heroine-centred Gothic world. Evelina owes much to Richardson, but Burney's creation of a more fallible, vulnerable and comic heroine shows her own distinctive contribution to the novel tradition, and her work influenced the creation of Jane Austen's heroines. In the creation of Evelina Burney may have been influenced by Eliza Haywood, whose Betsy Thoughtless (1751) presents a comic heroine who makes mistakes.¹ These examples show the women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century not as imitators of a masculine point of view, but as part of a tradition already heavily influenced by women writers.

Elaine Showalter has suggested using the concept of "subculture" to define a tradition of women's writing. In her definition, a group of writers within a literary tradition but for some reason apart from the mainstream -- such as literature in English written in former colonies, black literature in America, and women's literature -- forms a

¹See J.P. Erickson, "Evelina and Betsy Thoughtless", Texas Studies in Literature and Language 6 (1964), 96-103.

subculture.¹ This idea is relevant to the study of eighteenth-century women writers. Women's writing is, in some ways, distinct from the main tradition in the eighteenth century, firstly because the majority of women writers are novelists, and secondly because they tend to keep to certain types of sentimental and epistolary novels. However, women's novels in the eighteenth century should perhaps be considered not as manifestations of a female subculture within a major tradition, but as a large and influential part of a genre which is itself apart from the mainstream literary tradition. In the early eighteenth century the novel was a new genre with a low critical reputation, and even after the work of Richardson and Fielding the novel was usually considered an inferior genre. Georges May suggests that in eighteenth-century France, women formed the majority of novelists because male writers had abandoned the form as inferior.² In England, too, a similar explanation of the connection between women writers and the novel may be helpful. Robert Halsband

¹Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, pp. 12-15.

²Le dilemme du roman au XVIII^e siècle: Étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique (1715-1761) (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 224-5.

writes that before 1740, "the low repute of fiction and of women who wrote it reinforced each other",¹ while Philippe Séjourné notes that between 1740 and 1800 many critics considered the novel an inferior genre which was, for that reason, suited to women.² Both women writers and the novel, however, were held in higher esteem by the end of the eighteenth century. May writes that women and novels grew in esteem together. "Les romans . . . aidés par les femmes qui en écrivaient d'excellents et mettaient tout le genre à la mode, et les femmes, aidées par les romans qui les célébraient et les adulaient, ne pouvaient pas manquer de triompher ensemble d'une critique fossilisée".³

Women writers, then, stand in a very interesting position in relation to the eighteenth-century novel. The connection between women and the novel played a part in establishing a particular tradition for women's writing, and also influenced the development of the novel. It is useful, therefore, to study women's novels as a group in the late eighteenth century, and to analyse any distinctive viewpoints they share. This study gives particular attention to the women novelists' presentation of an ideal

¹"The Female Pen", 702-3.

²See Séjourné, Aspects généraux du roman féminin, p. 66.

³May, p. 227.

of womanhood. The eighteenth-century idealization of femininity is important to the women novelists in a double way. It provides them with a feminine role in writing, and it is also a central subject in their novels. The feminine ideal as described by women novelists has certain special characteristics, and it is here, I believe, that the most significant differences between men's and women's novels in the eighteenth century are found.

The idealization of womanhood in the eighteenth century means that the literary image of womanhood changes greatly. Satires on women, which from medieval times to the Restoration period pictured women as lustful and inconstant creatures, change their tone, and "denunciations of woman's lust, vindictiveness, or particular propensity toward evil are largely replaced by paternal guidance or playful ridicule of her frivolity".¹ Even ridicule becomes less frequent, as "satire of woman [is] replaced by praise of Womanhood".² The tradition of misogynist writing does not disappear entirely, and traces of it can be found even in Fielding and Richardson, who do much to popularize new images of womanhood. The lustful woman can

¹Katharine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 174.

²Marlene Legates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought", Eighteenth-Century Studies 10 (1976-7), 24.

be seen in the comic Lady Booby in Joseph Andrews, and in Richardson's more sinister creations, Mrs. Jewkes in Pamela and Mrs. Sinclair in Clarissa.

Idealization of women is not new in this period, being found, for example, in the medieval tradition of courtly love, but in the eighteenth century there is certainly "a new dramatic emphasis" on the theme of female innocence.¹ Many eighteenth-century writers celebrate the innocent, chaste woman. Chastity is particularly important to the eighteenth-century ideal. As Nancy F. Cott writes, the "traditionally dominant Anglo-American definition of woman as especially sexual . . . was reversed and transformed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries into the view that women . . . were less carnal and lustful than men".² Both Richardson and Fielding are creators of the new feminine ideal. In Clarissa Richardson creates a heroine embodying the ideals of feminine purity and integrity. In Amelia Fielding portrays a heroine whose tenderness, modesty and faithfulness make her an ideal wife.

While this idealization of womanhood is general, women novelists have a distinctive version of it. More than male writers, they tend to glorify the woman and place great emphasis on her moral superiority. They often elevate

¹Legates, p. 27.

²"Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 4 no. 2 (1978), 221.

female innocence into an object of male worship. Male novelists present us with many examples of the ideal eighteenth-century wife, described by Lawrence Stone as

a well-informed and motivated woman with the educational training and the internalized desire to devote her life partly to pleasing her husband and providing him with friendship and intelligent companionship, partly to the efficient supervision of servants and domestic arrangements; and partly to educating her children in ways appropriate for their future.¹

Such a woman demands respect, but she does not warrant the kind of worship offered to the heroine of Susannah Minifie's Coombe Wood (1783) by a male character who writes:

I was admitted to the presence of an Angel; one hand, whiter than snow, she condescended to offer me; the other covered her eyes with her handkerchief. Be not angry, I only lifted her hand towards my lips; she was too much of a deity for more; a touch would have been sacreligious. I presumed no farther than to breathe a blessing. Innocence how great thy powers!²

Few writers go to this extreme, but the image of woman as angel is particularly prevalent in the work of female novelists of this period.

This is partly due to the influence of Richardson, who was warmly hailed as a champion of women because of his

¹Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, p. 358.

²Coombe Wood (London: R. Baldwin, 1783), I, 22.

presentation of them as superior moral beings. Margaret Collier told him that he was "the only candid man, I believe, with regard to women's understandings; and indeed their only champion, and protector, I may say, in your writings; for you write of angels, instead of women".¹ Clarissa is an influential example of the angelic woman. Towards the end of the novel Belford writes to Lovelace:

How many opportunities must thou have had of admiring her inestimable worth, yet couldst have thy senses so much absorbed in the WOMAN in her charming person, as to be blind to the ANGEL that shines out in such full glory in her mind! Indeed, I have ever thought myself, when blest with her conversation, in the company of a real Angel. . . .²

Richardson's heroine, however, becomes an angel only after her virtues have been thoroughly tested and she is close to death and heaven. Richardson insists that before this she is a woman with human faults. Imitators of Richardson like Susannah Minifie grant a superior position to the heroine simply because she is a woman.

Richardson is not the only source for the image of woman as angel. Extreme glorification of women has its source in an earlier tradition of fiction. The seventeenth-century French romance, itself a genre closely connected with female writers and readers,³ places the heroine in a position of

¹Letter to Richardson, October 3, 1755; in The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, ed. A.L. Barbauld (London: Richard Phillips, 1804), II, 78.

²Clarissa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930), VII, 324.

³H.K. Miller, "Augustan Prose Fiction and the Romance Tradition", p. 244: "the seventeenth-century romance . . . was primarily a plaything for a group of rather extraordinary women".

absolute authority over her adoring lover. Later chapters will show that women novelists in the eighteenth century were influenced by this conception of the heroine, and that attitudes to women derived from the French romances form a distinctive and significant element in their work.

An idealized view of womanhood is part of the general climate of opinion in the late eighteenth century. Women novelists adopt this view, and also adapt it to their own purposes. They evidently base their portrayal of the ideal heroine on the belief that she proves something about women in general. "Every instance of merit in one of our own sex, undoubtedly reflects a degree of lustre on the whole", declares a female character in a novel by Margaret and Susannah Minifie, and most women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century agree.¹ However, the feminine ideal presented by the women novelists may not have done women in general the service that the novelists intended. The following chapters will discuss the development of a special role for the woman writer in this period, and examine the implications of women novelists' attempts to raise women's status by their presentation of ideal womanhood. Individual women writers will be discussed to indicate their contribution to the discussion about ideal womanhood and to developing literary traditions in a period when the rise of the novel and the rise of the woman writer are combined.

¹The Histories of Lady Frances S-- , and Lady Caroline S-- (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1763), II, 3.

CHAPTER 2

THE WOMAN NOVELIST'S NEW ROLE

In 1763 the Critical Review predicted that Margaret and Susannah Minifie would "one day rank amongst the first authoresses of this authoress-creating age".¹ This prophecy was by no means fulfilled, but the Minifie sisters remain of interest, not as outstanding, but as representative women novelists of the age. Their Histories of Lady Frances S-, and Lady Caroline S- is described in the same review as "an interesting story, related in an easy and familiar style, with many sensible and judicious observations interspersed; and [with] an unaffected air of piety and virtue diffused thro' the whole."² These remarks attribute to the novel what are considered particularly feminine characteristics in writing in the late eighteenth century. The familiar style, the observations on behaviour, and the air of piety are expected of all women's novels. The late eighteenth century is not only an authoress-creating age, but an age which creates new roles and a new status for its authoresses. Reviewers in the Monthly Review, the Critical Review and other literary periodicals are instrumental in defining and establishing the new role of the woman writer, and in their work we can trace the development of a new attitude to women writers in the late eighteenth century. The most important change in attitude is the new acceptance of women writers as respectable.

During the second half of the eighteenth century women writers were accepted into the literary world in a different

¹Critical Review 16 (1763), 117.

²Critical Review 16 (1763), 108.

manner from those of the previous age. The growth of the woman writer's respectability is a complex phenomenon. It is partly the result of the growth of authorship as a trade. Women writers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries can be seen to fall into two main categories: aristocratic women poets and notorious women who wrote plays and novels for money. Even the aristocratic women suffered from a prejudice against women writers. The Duchess of Newcastle wrote in Poems and Fancies (1653), "I imagine I shall be censur'd by my owne Sex; and Men will cast a smile of scorne upon my Book".¹ Her fears proved correct. Dorothy Osborne wrote of her in 1653, "Sure, the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books".² Often, however, aristocratic women writers received elaborate praise, partly because of their social status and because of the fact that they were sources of literary patronage. Mercenary female writers, on the other hand, ran the risk of insertion into the Dunciad or of getting the reputation of a "stupid, infamous, scribbling woman".³ Much of the animosity against these women was caused by the fact that writing for money was not respectable for either sex. This attitude gradually changed during the eighteenth century, and by 1744 an eminently respectable woman writer, Sarah Fielding, could mention the mercenary motive of "Distress in her Circumstances" as an acceptable reason for her writing.⁴

The establishment of authorship as a trade did much to

¹Poems, and Fancies (London: J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1653), A3 recto.

²The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple 1652-54 ed. Kingsley Hart (Folio Society, 1968), p. 53.

³Swift on Eliza Haywood, in a letter to the Countess of Suffolk, 26th October 1731; in The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, ed. Harold Williams, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), III, 501.

⁴The Adventures of David Simple (London: A. Millar, 1744), I, iv.

legitimize women's writing for money. However, novel-writing, which was becoming a profitable branch of that trade, did not immediately gain critical acceptance, and the close association of women and the novel seems to have been a hindrance in the mid-eighteenth century to the establishment of the respectable woman writer. Most reviewers, despite their praises of Fielding and Richardson, had little respect for the novel, and they often wrote as if the female reader were entirely responsible for its appearance. The Critical Review lamented that "[t]he taste for novel writing and novel reading is grown so universal among us", but feared that to condemn such a taste would be "encroaching on the privileges and pleasures of the fair sex, who have an indisputable right to amuse themselves in what manner they please".¹ The low quality of much fiction was blamed on female readers, for "as . . . female readers in particular have generally the most voracious appetites, and are not over delicate in the choice of their food, every thing that is new will go down".² It might be expected that the woman novelist, whose work was usually aimed at the female reader, would gain little respect in the reviews. "To the tradition of prejudice against her as a woman author was added the weight of disrepute connected with the novel form", writes John Tinnon Taylor.³

It was as learned women, as moralists, or as poets, rather than as novelists, that women writers received praise in the middle of the eighteenth century. Frances Brooke's publication of her tragedy Virginia, with some poems, in 1756, raised her to the status of learned woman. "To the number of learned and

¹Critical Review 16 (1763), 108.

²Critical Review 16 (1763), 449.

³Early Opposition to the English Novel; The Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830 (New York: King's Crown Press, 1943), p. 81.

ingenious Ladies whom we have had the honour of celebrating . . . we have now the pleasure to add the name of Mrs. Frances Brooke", announced the Monthly Review.¹ Sarah Fielding's novels received only brief reviews, but her translation of Xenophon's Memoirs of Socrates (1762) received several pages of praise.² The praise of Elizabeth Carter's works illustrates the approval of women writers as poets and scholars. Her Poems on Several Occasions were made the occasion for general comments on the improvements in female literary talents:

There never was perhaps an age wherein the fair sex made so conspicuous a figure with regard to literary accomplishments as in our own. We may all remember the time, when a woman who could spell was looked on as an extraordinary phenomenon, and a reading and writing wife was considered as a miracle; but the case at present is quite otherwise.³

Her translation of Epictetus was praised by the reviews,⁴ and used as a proof of women's intellectual powers. Elizabeth Carter was praised in John Duncombe's Feminiad (1754), and the Monthly Review agreed with him that she was "equalled . . . by few of either sex, for strength of imagination, soundness of judgment, and extensive knowledge".⁵ While the woman novelist's reputation was still in doubt, the learned woman writer was being enthusiastically accepted.

Reviews of the mid-eighteenth century show a general dislike of or indifference to novels. "The most we can do," explains one reviewer, "with respect to those numerous novels, that issue continually from the press, is to give rather a character than an account of each. To do even this, however, we find no easy

¹Monthly Review 14 (1756), 560.

²See Monthly Review 27 (1762), 171-6, and Critical Review 13 (1762), 176-80.

³Critical Review 13 (1762), 180.

⁴See Monthly Review 18 (1758), 588-96, and Critical Review 6 (1758), 149-58.

⁵Monthly Review 10 (1754), 373.

task; since we might say of them, as Pope, with less justice, says of the ladies,

Most novels have no character at all."¹

Later in the century the situation changed, and the change in the novel's status can be briefly indicated by two reviews, thirty years apart, of very minor novels. In 1764 The Life and Adventures of a reformed Magdalen was sarcastically judged to be "sufficiently destitute of sentiment, spirit and elegance to make proper furniture for a Circulating Library",² the reviewer's scorn evidently extending from this novel to all popular novels. In 1794 Angeline, or Sketches from Nature, though an unimportant work in itself, evidently deserved more serious attention as a representative of a much more respectable genre. This time the recommendation to the circulating library is sincere. Angeline is judged to be "particularly well calculated for a circulating-library; . . . unmixed with any sentiments which can corrupt the purity of the mind".³ The growth of the novel's reputation is clearly connected to its growth in moral respectability, and this in turn is linked to its association with female writers and readers. Critics of the novel are particularly concerned with its effect on the purity of the female mind. Women novelists of the late eighteenth century, whose works do not threaten that purity, become respectable themselves and help to raise the novel as a genre to respectability.

The novel's moral respectability, then, is itself partly a result of its association with women; and the primary reason for the change in women novelists' status and role in the late eighteenth century is the widespread change in attitudes to

¹Monthly Review 20 (1759), 275-6.

²Monthly Review 30 (1764), 77.

³Critical Review 2nd. ser. 12 (1794), 237.

women in general. The idealization of women as exemplars of chastity, modesty, piety and tenderness means that women novelists who display these virtues can be accepted and praised by their contemporaries. The eighteenth-century idealization of womanhood is the force behind a new interest in women's writing and a formulation of its special qualities. It also dictates the terms on which women's writing can be acceptable. The role of the professional writer and the role of the virtuous woman are both changing in the eighteenth century; and though in some respects they may appear to be incompatible roles, in fact the comments of late eighteenth-century reviewers indicate that the two can be combined. Writing novels is becoming a respectable occupation for a woman of virtue.

One aspect of the late-eighteenth-century attitude to women is the idealization of her place in the family. The ideal of the domestic woman, financially dependent on father or husband, devoting her life to family cares, seems on first thought to be totally opposed to the idea of a woman writing professionally. Domesticity might be idealized within her novel, but the writer herself was nevertheless stepping outside the accepted feminine role. Reviewers sometimes hint at this as they recommend more feminine pursuits to those women whose novels they find unworthy of praise. The Monthly Review offered the author of The Fair Citizen; or, the real Adventures of Miss Charlotte Bellmour, a hint "which she may profit from, if she does not too much mistake her talents; viz. that one good Pudding is worth fifty modern Romances".¹ However, there was a growing feeling that attention to domestic duties could be made compatible with intellectual pursuits. This was a factor in the fairly widespread approval of the bluestockings, summed up in Dr. Johnson's

¹Monthly Review 17 (1757), 82.

praise of Elizabeth Carter that she could "make a pudding, as well as translate Epictetus".¹ Richardson's belief that "all the intellectual pleasures a lady can give herself, not neglecting the necessary employments that shall make her shine in her domestic duties, should be given",² being expounded in detail in Clarissa and in Sir Charles Grandison, reached a wide audience.

If intellectual pleasures were compatible with domestic duties, so was writing novels. The main difference was the financial motive involved, and this, too, was acceptable if a woman lacked sufficient financial support. As we have seen, economic employment for women was on the decline in the eighteenth century: and women were increasingly dependent upon men, but this may actually have encouraged the acceptance of the woman writer. Husbands and fathers frequently died or failed in their duty of financial support, and in this case writing was one employment which could earn money without taking a woman from her home and family. Many women made a point in their prefaces of the failure of their men to support them. Sarah Emma Spencer claimed that her Memoirs of the Miss Holmsbys was "written by the bed-side of a sick husband, who has no other support than what my writings will produce",³ combining the appeal of a woman deprived of male support with the implication that literary labours have been combined with womanly duties. Reviewers usually responded to these claims with a relaxation of critical severity. As one Monthly reviewer expressed it, "[a] widow, reduced from a state of

¹The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (London: J. Buckland et al., 1787) XI, 205.

²Letter to Sophia Westcomb, c. 1746, in Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 65-66.

³Author's Preface, quoted in Monthly Review 80 (1789), 169.

affluence to the hard necessity of writing, to provide for a numerous family, may justly hope to be screened by humanity from the shafts of criticism".¹ Towards the end of the century the Monthly Review even described one young woman's motive for writing as "a laudable desire of subsisting by her own resources".²

Of all the various aspects of the eighteenth-century idealization of women, the new emphasis on women's chastity probably played the most important part in changing the role of the woman writer. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century, women's writing and female unchastity had often been thought to be related. Elizabeth Montagu expressed a common idea when she wrote in 1749, "I am sorry to say the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity".³ During the following half century a growing belief in woman's natural tendency to chastity, indeed in her lack of sexual feelings, succeeded in breaking that conceptual link between wit and unchastity in women.

It is not difficult to see why such a link was originally made. Many of the women of the Restoration period who tried to make a living out of "wit", through the professions of acting and writing, led notoriously unchaste lives. Just as important as their sexual lives was the "unchastity" of their writings. They adopted the licentious tone of Restoration literature, in contrast to the typical women writers of the mid-eighteenth century, who adopted a chaste tone which by then was considered peculiarly feminine. The beginnings of this new emphasis on female chastity can be seen early in the eighteenth century.

¹Monthly Review 2nd. ser. 3 (1790), 90.

²Monthly Review 2nd. ser. 25 (1798), 213.

³Letter to Mrs. Donnellan, in The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, Vol.III, ed. Matthew Montagu (London: T.Cadell and W. Davies, 1813), p. 97.

Penelope Aubin refused to write like contemporary women "whose Lives and Writings have, I fear, too great a Resemblance",¹ and wrote with religious and moral aims instead. Elizabeth Rowe and Jane Barker were two other early respectable women writers. It was not until later in the eighteenth century, however, that this respectable role became the norm for women writers. The association between female wit and female unchastity was still strong, and it militated against the new status which women's writing was beginning to claim.

Traces of this equation of female wit and unchastity can be found in mid-eighteenth-century reviews. There is often an elaborate defence of a particular writer's sexual reputation. In 1762 the Critical Review, praising Elizabeth Carter's Poems on Several Occasions, thought it necessary to point out the author's purity:

It has been often remarked, with what degree of truth we will not pretend to determine, that the female muse is seldom altogether so chaste as could be wished, and that most of our lady-writers are rather deficient in point of morality. To the honour of Mrs. Carter it may be said, that there is scarce a line in this volume which does not breathe the purest sentiments . . .²

The Monthly Review in 1755 includes a similar defence of Mary Masters's character in its discussion of her Familiar Letters and Poems on Several Occasions:

We cannot conclude without one remark, in justice to this lady, and for the satisfaction of those who may not happen to be acquainted with her literary performances, that she is a chaste, moral, and religious, as well as an agreeable and ingenious writer. We mention this circumstance, as certain daughters of the muses have been less eminent for

¹Quoted in William McBurney, "Mrs. Penelope Aubin and the Early Eighteenth-Century English Novel", HLQ 20 (1956-7), 251.

²Critical Review 13 (1762), 181.

their virtue than their wit; but Mrs. Masters's character, as a WOMAN, is such as must have had a considerable share in inducing her numerous friends to subscribe to the POETESS . . .¹

While these reviews helped to establish a connection between women's poetry and virtue, the necessity of defence shows that a belief in the unchastity of female wits still existed.

Clearly a woman writer's respectability in the eighteenth century depended on her chastity, and writing itself was judged according to its "chastity". The defences of Elizabeth Carter and Mary Masters quoted above hardly distinguish between chastity in the lives and in the writings of the two women. When Mary Masters is described as a "chaste, moral, and religious . . . writer" it is implied both that her writing exhibits these qualities, and that she personally is chaste, moral, and religious. The point is made more explicitly when the writer's "character as a WOMAN" is mentioned as an inducement to read her work. This identification of an author's personal virtues with the virtues of her written work is found again and again in eighteenth-century reviews. When "the production of a lady" is said to show "evident marks of a chasteness and delicacy of imagination",² the author's personal character is praised as much as her work. One reviewer of Cecilia did not know "which to admire most, the purity of the Writer's heart, or the force and extent of her understanding".³ In an age which saw a literary work as a direct expression of its author's personality, women writers could demonstrate their purity by the purity of their writings, and by doing so they gained acceptance in the literary world.

¹Monthly Review 13 (1755), 156.

²Critical Review 56 (1783), 476.

³Monthly Review 67 (1782), 453.

Eliza Haywood's career illustrates the changes in the woman writer's role which take place around the middle of the eighteenth century. In the 1720s she wrote a large number of novels, many of them containing thinly-disguised scandal about famous people of the time. James Sterling placed her with Aphra Behn and Mary Delarivière Manley in the "fair Triumvirate of Wit", but to many contemporaries they were a triumvirate of notorious immorality.¹ In the 1740s and 1750s Haywood's writing changes a great deal. Novels like Betsy Thoughtless and Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy have a sober, moralizing tone. Haywood's later works also include conduct books which give moral advice to women. These changes can be seen as a versatile writer's shrewd response to changes in the literary market. Eighteenth-century critics, however, greeted Eliza Haywood's later works as proofs of a personal moral conversion. In The Progress of Romance (1785) Clara Reeve rescues Haywood from the now contaminating company of the other members of the "fair Triumvirate". Though Haywood's early "amorous novels" are to be rejected, she should be treated more respectfully than Behn and Manley, because:

she repented of her faults, and employed the latter part of her life in expiating the offences of the former. -- There is reason to believe that the examples of [Behn and Manley] seduced Mrs Heywood [sic] into the same track . . . [However, she] had the singular good fortune to recover a lost reputation, and the yet greater honour to atone for her errors.²

Again we see how the writer's personal conduct and the purity of her writing are inextricably linked in the minds of eighteenth-century critics. Eliza Haywood's career was long enough and her talents adaptable enough for her to adopt the moral tone of mid-eighteenth-century novels, and for the later eighteenth century

¹"To Mrs. Eliza Haywood, on her Writings", line 48; in preface to Eliza Haywood, Secret Histories, Novels and Poems 2nd ed. (London: Dan. Browne, and S. Chapman, 1725), I, n.pag.

²The Progress of Romance (Colchester: W.Keymer, 1785), I, 120-21.

this meant that she could be redeemed as a chaste and respectable woman writer after all.

There were disadvantages to women writers in this new belief in their chastity. The constant necessity to display chastity restricted them in subject and style. When Agnes Maria Bennet's Juvenile Indiscretions was published anonymously in 1786, the Critical Review considered its "improper scenes" acceptable if the author was male, but unacceptable if the novel was, as its preface claimed, the work of a lady. "We do not charge him [the author, presumed masculine] with any flagrant offence against decency," wrote the reviewer, "but there is a propriety and a decorum which we expect in a female's conduct; there is a line, far on this side of indecency, which female gentleness should not step beyond".¹ Most women did not step beyond this line, and the result was that women's writing gained a reputation for respectability but lost some of its reputation for wit. An early Monthly Review shows the older view of female authorship: "A female author is generally, at least, a wit; and sure to produce lively and sprightly, if not very solid things".² Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Behn, and Mrs. Phillips are mentioned as examples. Whatever else can be urged against these writers, the reviewer implies, they are not dull. Within a few years, this view of women's writing is reversed; instead of being lively and witty, but unserious and possibly immoral, women writers are presented as impeccably chaste, but dull. The reviewer of Mrs. Woodfin's History of Miss Harriot Watson writes that "all the incidents are decent; the intention of the authoress seems to be virtuous; and if her pencil gives no violent pleasure, it

¹Critical Review 62 (1786), 68-9.

²Monthly Review 4 (1750-1), 307.

creates no uneasy sensations".¹ The Misses Minifies' novel, The Picture, was reviewed with a similar lack of enthusiasm: it was "innocent and moral", but "[h]igher praise than this we cannot, with all our partiality for the sex, allow this performance".²

While the chaste woman could be acceptable as a writer, female modesty, a concept closely connected with female chastity, proved most difficult to reconcile with professional writing. In the eighteenth century, when many memoirs and autobiographies were published, and when many novels were or pretended to be based on true memoirs, there was a connection between writing and personal revelation, which made a woman's publication of her work seem immodest. It was also very difficult for a member of the "sex where any thing approaching to assurance is intolerable"³ to justify a confidence in the merits and saleability of her writing. Literary ambition, as J.M.S. Tompkins points out, was the least acceptable of motives in a woman:

Let a woman write to amuse her leisure hours, to instruct her sex, to provide blameless reading for the young, or to boil the pot; moral zeal was an accepted justification and poverty an accepted excuse; but there was one motive which could neither be justified nor excused -- ambition . . .⁴

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The occasional implication that writing is an unsuitable occupation for a modest woman is perhaps a softened form of the old criticism of women writers for lewdness. While earlier in the century women's writing is linked in critics' minds with unchastity and the boldness of a shameless woman, in the later period women's writing is linked with lack of modesty and an

¹Critical Review 15 (1763), 63.

²Monthly Review 34 (1766), 406.

³Monthly Review 51 (1774), 389.

⁴Tompkins, p. 116.

unacceptable degree of self-confidence. The female novelist is no longer directly accused of being a loose woman, but any loss of modesty in the late eighteenth century implies a degree of danger to feminine purity. The central problem for the late eighteenth-century woman writer, then, is how to publish her work and yet retain her reputation as a modest woman.

Many women tackled this problem by claiming that they were only publishing their work because their friends insisted on it. Elizabeth Carter's correspondence with Elizabeth Montagu just before the publication of her Poems On Several Occasions illustrates the fear of seeming immodest in conflict with the desire for literary fame. Carter writes repeatedly that she does not want to publish, and will only do so if Elizabeth Montagu and Catherine Talbot insist. On October 2nd, 1761, she writes to Elizabeth Montagu, "I do thank you for your tenderness to my 'qualms and squeamishnesses', and should thank you exceedingly, indeed, if you would extend it so far as to save me from the confusion of this publication".¹ However, this plea is followed a few days later by an enthusiastic discussion of the details of publication. On October 8th she writes that Catherine Talbot wants her to publish, and begins to discuss details: "Shall it be printed in octavo? Shall I send the manuscript to you as soon as I have transcribed it? . . . I think you said the proofs might be sent to you, and you would convey them to me".² She goes on to repeat her reluctance to publish. "If you have relented . . . I shall be heartily glad: if not, I will . . . get over my scruples as well as I can." A few lines later she is making arrangements "that the printing

¹Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1817), I, 126.

²Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, I, 128-9.

may be executed as soon as possible after the manuscript is ready".¹ Female modesty having been satisfied by a show of reluctance, Carter was able to enjoy the success of her poems with a clear conscience.

Women novelists used their prefaces as a means of assuring readers of their modesty. Lady Dorothea Dubois prefixes her novel Theodora with the plea that she has been forced to write "by more pressing motives than a vain desire of applause . . . I trust I shall meet with that indulgence to which my sex, and unhappy circumstances, may unambitiously entitle me".² As the reviewer who quotes this passage comments, it "effectually precludes all criticism and censure".³ Reviewers often qualify their criticism of a woman's writing with an approving reference to her lack of personal ambition. The anonymous author of an epistolary novel called The School for Wives is praised because she "did not write with a desire of gaining fame, but of dispensing instruction".⁴ The Critical Review introduces an approving critique of The History of Miss Temple with this announcement: "Among the authors of this kind, who have laid their volumes at the shrine of virtue, we now behold a young lady timidly approaching to make her first offering".⁵ The virtuous intention and the timid attitude must both be stressed to assure readers of the feminine virtues, and hence respectability, of the writer.

Samuel Richardson's comments are relevant on this question as they are on so much to do with the eighteenth-century view of women. Although a great admirer of female modesty, he

¹Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, I, 129.

²Quoted in Monthly Review 43 (1770), 65-6.

³Monthly Review 43 (1770), 65.

⁴Critical Review 15 (1763), 133.

⁵Critical Review 43 (1777), 473.

recognised its detrimental effect on women's writing, which he also wanted to encourage. Many women of ample talent, he considered, were prevented by modesty from publishing. He boasted of knowing "near a Score of very admirable Women . . . all of them such as wd. do Credit to their Sex, & to the Commonwealth of Letters, did not their Modesty with-hold them from appearing in it".¹ Here, perhaps, Richardson seems to be proud of the modesty as much as sorry about its effects, but many of his letters to literary women encourage them to write and publish. He gave writers like Charlotte Lennox and Sarah Fielding a combination of practical help and encouragement, and on the whole his reputation as friend to women's talents was well deserved. However, he did not believe that female modesty should be overcome in the interests of literary ambition, but that it was in itself a guarantee of good writing. In writing to Sophia Westcomb to encourage her to correspond with him, he tries to overcome her fear of not writing well enough by suggesting that "bashfulness, or diffidence of a person's own merits, are but other words for undoubted worthiness; . . . such a lady cannot set pen to paper but a beauty must follow it; yet herself the last person that knows it".² This was written to encourage private correspondence, not publication, but a similar rationale became a common way of reconciling female modesty with professional writing. If a woman was hesitant about publication she vindicated both her modesty as a woman, and the quality of the work itself.

Thus women writers in the late eighteenth century gained respectability by incorporating the essential female virtues in

¹Letter to Johannes Stinstra, 2 June 1753, in Selected Letters, p. 234.

²To Sophia Westcomb, c. 1746, in Selected Letters, p. 66.

their writing, and by trying to show that their own lives were patterns of female virtue. This process encouraged literary critics to discuss the special qualities of women's writing, and a characteristic late-eighteenth-century definition of feminine writing emerged. It is found in the letter from Richardson to Sophia Westcomb quoted above. If we look again at the assertion that a diffident woman "cannot set pen to paper but a beauty must follow it; yet herself the last person that knows it", we can see that it contains a view of the unconsciousness of the creative process in women, which is echoed throughout the period. Women's literary powers are not thought to be under their control, and literary excellence comes to them unbidden. In extreme cases, even the act of setting pen to paper has nothing to do with the writer herself. Hester Mulso (later Chapone) sent one of her poems to Elizabeth Carter to read, but disclaimed any part in its production, declaring that "the pen, unbidden, wrote it down."¹

Such a view of the spontaneity of literary expression is particularly suited to epistolary writing, which is Richardson's subject in the letter to Sophia Westcomb. He praises letter writing because it is related to the heart rather than the head. Letters are not carefully thought-out documents but "the familiar correspondences of friendly and undesigning hearts."² Richardson admires "none but the natural and easy beauties of the pen".³ "Natural", "easy", and "undesigning" writing was considered suitable for the familiar letter, and also for women. Hence women were believed to have a natural talent for writing letters. When Mrs. Delany remarks that Dr. Young's letters are

¹Letter to Elizabeth Carter, March 25, (1750?) in The Works of Mrs. Chapone (London: John Murray, 1807), I, 26.

²Selected Letters, p. 64.

³Selected Letters, p. 66.

"the best collection of men's letters I ever read",¹ her emphasis suggests that women's letters set the standard of epistolary excellence. Thomas Marriott is more explicit in his announcement that:

By Nature prompted, Females write a letter,
Than Pope, or Swift, or Bolingbroke, far better . . .²

Elizabeth and Richard Griffith prefaced the first volume of their love letters with these remarks from a "Clergyman of Taste and Literature":

They both write the English Language in its greatest Purity; shall I say she excels in Expression, Wit, and Spirit? Partiality to the Sex, who beat us all to nothing in Conversation and Letter-writing, may incline me to judge so . . .³

This belief was so widespread that it became an obvious step for a woman who wanted to write professionally to move from private correspondence to an epistolary novel.

Various other special talents were attributed to women, and these received ample acknowledgement from reviewers. Women were credited with an eye for detail, especially useful in writing novels about domestic life. Women's refined sensibilities meant that "[a] woman only can enter justly into all the scruples and refinements of female manners".⁴ A woman writer was the best interpreter not only of a female character's sensibility, but of another woman writer. Hence Elizabeth Griffith's translation of the Memoirs of Ninon de l'Enclos was praised in terms of her sex:

¹Letter to Mrs. Dewes, 2 December 1753; in The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany, ed. Lady Llanover, First Series (London: R. Bentley, 1861), III, 247.

²Female Conduct . . . A Poem (London: W. Owen, 1759), p. 68.

³A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances, 2nd ed. (London: W. Johnston, 1761), I, iv.

⁴Critical Review 13 (1762), 435.

"a female Translator will ever do most justice to a female Original".¹ Women's poetry was also credited with special feminine qualities, and was described as being generally "the sweetest, tenderest, and most remarkable for imagery".²

The reviewers' commendations have in common an implicit view of the naturalness and unconsciousness of women's writing. A word used very frequently in praise of a woman's novel is "artless". One woman's novel, Constance, was described by the Critical Review in this manner: "In this artless narrative, the incidents are numerous and striking, the situations interesting and pathetic, the morality unexceptionable".³ H.M. Williams's Julia received praise as a "natural and affecting" and "artless" tale.⁴ The adjective "artless" as applied to women's novels clearly echoes Richardson's description of the easy, unplanned nature of women's writing. It also suggests a moral quality, as does Richardson's adjective "undesigning". Artfulness in the sense of design and manipulation being completely contrary to the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood, it was necessary for women's novels, in order to reflect the properly feminine character of their writers, to be artless. This suggests a fundamental ambivalence in eighteenth-century praise of women's writing. It is strange praise of a work of art to call it artless; and the frequency of such praise implies that women's writing in the eighteenth century only achieved respectability and acceptability by being excluded from the realms of art.

Indeed, many of the terms used in praise of women's writing can be seen to have a subtly repressive effect on it. They

¹Monthly Review 25 (1761), 475.

²Critical Review 44 (1777), 151.

³Critical Review 60 (1785), 394.

⁴General Magazine and Impartial Review 4 (1790), 159.

often acted as screens to hide the real contempt that critics felt for the "feminine" qualities in writing. We can deduce this because the screen is occasionally ineffective, and critics explicitly link the revered female talents with the ridiculed female mistakes. The Critical Review praises the author of Laura and Augustus for female virtues and immediately goes on to criticize the faults of the composition as equally female qualities:

If the young lady did not announce herself in the title, she would betray the author, by the warmth, the tenderness, and the unaffected modesty of her descriptions. She will excuse us for adding, that she would betray herself, by a few inaccuracies in language, and a little improbability in some of the incidents . . .¹

The Monthly Review similarly combines compliment and contempt in attributing the anonymous History of the Hon. Mrs. Rosemont and Sir Henry Cardigan to a woman for two reasons:

from the freedom and vivacity with which it is written, and from several glaring deficiencies [sic] even in common grammatical construction. This fault we have often observed in the compositions of ladies, who, notwithstanding, have acquired all the higher graces of language: and have almost instinctively caught at elegance without giving themselves the trouble of pursuing the strict forms of grammar.²

This illustrates that the compliment "artless", applied to women's writing, was often a cover for a more pejorative meaning of the word.

The ideology of women's instinctive elegance and grace operated to allow critics to pay women writers extravagant compliments without according them real respect. Critics claimed to be especially favourable to women's productions, but

¹Critical Review 57 (1784), 233.

²Monthly Review 64 (1781), 469.

their reluctance to criticize was clearly an expression of their withholding of respect, summed up in the Monthly Review's dismissive "no more, as it is a lady's production".¹ The very qualities which made women acceptable as writers could be exploited by critics to insinuate their contempt of the writing itself. The mercenary motive of the woman writer was often mentioned, ostensibly in order to praise it, but really to insinuate that the work would be bought rather as an act of charity than because of its merits. The Critical Review wrote of Charlotte Charke's History of Henry Dumont, Esq; and Miss Charlotte Evelyn, "though we do not advise the perusal of the book; we should be sorry if we hindered the poor woman from receiving three shillings".² Praise of moral or pious intentions could similarly be used as an oblique expression of contempt. One reviewer wrote, "we must not be too severe with a lady, whose intentions appear to be good, whatever her book may be".³ Often the contempt for women's writing powers is quite open. "The narrative is well enough told for a woman", comments one reviewer.⁴ Another writes that "the stile, though often careless . . . is yet such as may easily be excused in a female writer,"⁵ while a more impatient reviewer refers to "vulgarisms, only to be expected from a scribbling female".⁶

The critics' reactions to the many anonymous works of the eighteenth century make a useful indication of their attitude to women's writing. When a work appeared anonymously reviewers were always eager to deduce from internal evidence the sex of

¹Monthly Review 21 (1759), 82.

²Critical Review 1 (1756), 138.

³Monthly Review 2nd. ser. 2 (1790), 465.

⁴Critical Review 3 (1757), 177.

⁵Critical Review 20 (1765), 290.

⁶Monthly Review 18 (1758), 183.

the author. The most important thing for the Critical reviewer to say about Lumley-House was whether its claim to be "by a young lady" was genuine, and "after carefully reading these volumes, we can find in them nothing inconsistent with the description of the author which appears in the title".¹ Such scrutiny was necessary because it was believed that many male hacks claimed on their title-pages to be ladies, because the lower standard expected from women meant that a bad novel, if written "by a lady", was more likely to be accepted than if it was the work of a man. This practice aroused great hostility in reviewers, partly because of the unfairness of a man's claiming the critical indulgence due to a lady, and partly because this female impersonation threatened to blur the clear distinctions between the writing of men and of women on which the notion of separate literary spheres was being built. "In this age of petit-maitres and chevaliers, there is no such thing as distinguishing men from women", complains one reviewer.² However, critics continued to distinguish male and female productions on familiar grounds. Tenderness, delicacy, vivacity and elegance were proofs of female authorship; and so, on the negative side, were grammatical errors. Even a work written by a schoolmistress was believed to have been written with male help because it was "more correct than could be expected from a female pen".³ So accepted were the "female" qualities that a reviewer in 1772 was able to deduce that a novel was written by a woman because of certain undefined "feminine strokes" -- any further explanation being considered

¹Critical Review 63 (1787), 391.

²Critical Review 44 (1777), 478.

³Monthly Review 35 (1766), 149.

unnecessary.¹

Such criteria for judging the sex of a novel's author proved inadequate when a work of above average merit appeared. Henry Fielding wrote the preface to the second edition of David Simple partly so that he could deny the rumour that he was its author.² Evelina, Mary Wollstonecraft's Mary, and Maria Edgeworth's Letters for Literary Ladies all first appeared anonymously, and were all greeted as the works of men.³ These mistakes arose from an assumption that women's writing must be inferior in quality.

We can see, then, that reviewers' attitudes to women's writing were far from favourable. Every special term of praise for women's writing had its mirror-image of implied or explicit contempt. The special sphere defined for women's writing gave them an area to work in and also prohibited them from moving out of it. The modesty and chastity which women's writing was meant to display on all occasions meant that they were praised for their ability to write romantic stories but unable to venture into the picaresque. Their much vaunted knowledge of the heart was set in opposition to the knowledge of the world so often praised in men's writings. Whereas a woman was never pardonable for failing to have a moral aim, or for stepping beyond the bounds of decency, a man could be excused morality in the name of knowledge of the world. The Amours of Charles Careless, Esq. are described as "deficient in regard to moral; but the author shews himself not unacquainted with the world; so that if he has not represented all things as they ought to be, he has shewn

¹Critical Review 34 (1772), 473.

²This preface appears in The Adventures of David Simple, ed. Malcolm Kelsall (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 3-8.

³See Critical Review 46 (1778), 202-4 (review of Evelina); Critical Review 66 (1788), 74, and Monthly Review 2nd ser. 2 (1790), 352-3 (reviews of Mary); and Critical Review 2nd ser. 19 (1797), 170-4 (review of Letters for Literary Ladies).

many things as they are".¹

This review points to a central critical discussion of the eighteenth century. The reviewer of Charles Careless evidently subscribes to the view of fiction held by Fielding and Smollett, that the creation of mixed characters, and the depiction of vice, are necessary to represent the world realistically. Fielding, for example, advises the reader of Tom Jones

not to condemn a character as a bad one, because it is not perfectly a good one. If thou dost delight in these Models of Perfection, there are Books enow written to gratify thy Taste; but as we have not, in the Course of our Conversation, ever happened to meet with any such Person, we have not chosen to introduce any such here.²

The opposing view, supported by Johnson and Richardson, is that the models of perfection Fielding dislikes are necessary to uphold standards of virtue. Johnson criticizes as morally irresponsible writers who

for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight . . . we lose the abhorrence of their faults.³

This disagreement about the moral responsibility of fiction has its effect on the development of a particular role for the woman novelist. Because of the sexual polarization of the late eighteenth century, the distinction between "morality" and "realism" is often seen in terms of a contrast between the proper male and female modes of writing. Women's fiction is expected to be moral and exemplary, men's to be realistic.

¹Monthly Review 30 (1764), 329.

²The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling, ed. Battestin and Bowers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Book X, Ch.1, p. 526.

³The Rambler, no.4, 31 March 1750; in The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Vol. III, ed. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 23.

Further distinctions between men's and women's writing arise from this. Humour and satire are associated with realistic, male writing, and sentiment with exemplary, female writing.

Thus many criticisms of a novel's style and tone are made on the basis of the writer's sex. Helen Maria Williams's Julia was criticized because it showed a "wicked wit" and "a wanton propensity to sarcasm" which the reviewer considered dangerously unfeminine.¹ Conversely, sentiment in a writer presumed to be male was criticized. The reviewer of an anonymous novel called Coxheath wrote: "The title of this novel led us to expect, what the relation of the adventures of an encampment in the hands of a master might have produced, wit and satire; instead of which we meet with nothing but . . . sentimental narrative".² The disappointment is clearly a result of particular expectations from men's writing. The title suggested male concerns, which handled by a "master" -- the word here implies the sex as well as the competence of the writer -- should produce the typical "male" style of wit and satire, instead of the "female" sentiment.

There is evidence, particularly at the beginning of this period, that the majority of reviewers prefer the "masculine" style of wit and humour. The writer of The Card is "a man of humour" who is praised for mocking "the spun-out superfluity of female chit-chat" which recent novels, especially Richardson's, display.³ The reviewer's judgment of Frances Brooke's translation of the Letters from Juliet Lady Catesby makes a distinction between two types of fiction: "To Readers of a delicate, sentimental turn of mind, the perusal of these Letters

¹General Magazine and Impartial Review 4 (1790), 160.

²Monthly Review 60 (1779), 239.

³Monthly Review 12 (1755), 117.

will be no unprofitable amusement. They are too destitute, however, both of narrative or humour, to be very generally admired".¹ The implied message of the review is that the work is suitable for women, "Readers of a delicate, sentimental turn", but that it will not be liked "generally" (by men) because of its lack of masculine humour. The sexual basis of the literary distinction is made very plain in some reviews, and novels are dismissed with a comment such as "[p]retty sentimental reading for the ladies".² The sexualization of the distinction between moral, sentimental writing and realistic, humorous writing, meant that women were confined in a sentimental mode defined as feminine, and praised for adopting it, though most critics' preference was for the alternative mode.

Men were allowed much more moral latitude in the name of humour and realism, but by the end of the century there is some evidence that they too should be restricted by the feminine code of chastity. In 1791, George Brewer's History of Tom Weston was condemned for being "not so chastely written, as every publication intended for general reading, ought to be; and particularly as novels should be, which are now so universally, and almost exclusively, perused by females".³ This criticism suggests that the cause of stricter standards of decency in literature was the combination of more widespread education for women with greater sexual polarization. Women's chastity must be protected, so works intended for them must be pure, and women were reading more than ever before, so that eventually all literary works, not just romantic stories, had to conform to a standard of female decorum to be generally accepted. A new

¹Monthly Review 22 (1760), 521.

²Monthly Review 25 (1761), 472.

³Monthly Review 2nd ser. 5 (1791), 466.

standard of fictional morality prevailed in the nineteenth century to become the Grundyism that hampered writers of both sexes, and it may be that the women novelists of the late eighteenth century, who upheld female decorum in their novels, had an important influence on this development.

These women novelists, then, have a role of some power and influence. It should not be forgotten, however, that their role is also an extremely restricted one. If men in the late eighteenth century were occasionally criticized for writings which overstepped the bounds of sexual decency, women were restricted by many taboos besides this one. The approval given to women novelists who display the required feminine virtues tends to obscure the readiness of critics to attack any woman writer who strayed from the female fold. A woman writer had to remain carefully feminine in tone, in style, and in her choice of subject-matter.

Women who attempted to write on theology, a particularly exclusive male province, received a good deal of abuse. The Progress of a Female Mind received this notice in the Monthly Review:

Behold a Lady floating on the surface of Theology! The lightness of her dress keeps her above water -- ah! no -- she sinks -- stretch out a pitying hand to save her -- she's gone! -- Seriously, this female Mind, if it is really a female Mind, would have been much better employed in attending the progress of Pickles and Conserves, than in pursuing those abstruse enquiries, which require a depth of erudition, and a reach of thought, that few Ladies can obtain.¹

The mockery, the recommendation of domestic instead of intellectual pursuits, and the doubt of women's powers, expressed in this passage, form a striking contrast to the Monthly Review's opinion that Elizabeth Carter's translation of Epictetus "will

¹Monthly Review 30 (1764), 237.

be no small mortification to the vanity of those men, who presume that the fair sex are unequal to the laborious pursuit of philosophic speculations".¹ This difference is partly the result of the period's tendency to see every work by a woman, whether good or bad, as representative of the powers of the sex as a whole. Thus Carter's translation proves, for the moment, women's intellectual powers, while The Progress of a Female Mind proves their lack of intellect. The difference is also due to the ideology of the separate sphere. While classical learning is acceptable in a woman, under certain conditions of feminine modesty and domesticity amply fulfilled by Elizabeth Carter, enquiry in theology is still strictly taboo.

Another of the restrictions laid on the woman writer by the establishment of a feminine literary sphere was a prohibition against being strongly feminist. It was not easy for a woman writer to avoid being thought of as in some way a champion of her sex. By writing, a woman was considered to be making a claim for the literary powers of women in general. Reviewers approved works which displayed evidence that "if [women] had the same opportunity of improvement with the men, there can be no doubt but that they would be equally capable of reaching any intellectual attainment",² but a woman writer faced the danger of being considered bold and unfeminine if she made an explicit vindication of women's powers. In an age when women's new respectability as writers was based largely on their claim to retiring modesty, it was sufficiently bold to write at all, without seeming bolder by any self-assertion or assertion on behalf of their sex. Once there was a respectable position for women writers, they were anxious not to forfeit it by failing in

¹Monthly Review 18 (1758), 588.

²Monthly Review 18 (1758), 588.

the required feminine modesty. The ideal of feminine modesty helped to suppress the connection between women's writing and feminist argument, as the ideal of female chastity helped suppress that between women's writing and sexual licence.

Women who ignored this particular demand of female modesty, and wrote as feminists, provoked from reviewers explicit statements of what was usually only implied: that women were acceptable in the literary world only if they kept to the sphere permitted them by men. In 1771, the Critical Review criticizes An Original Essay on Woman for advocating learning for women to a degree which would, in the reviewer's opinion, threaten their feminine attractiveness. While not wishing to contradict the assertion that women are as capable of intellectual work as men, the reviewer believes that literary excellence is a male prerogative: "We have always been of opinion with this lady, that the female mind is equally susceptible of attainments with that of man . . . At the same time . . . we hope the ladies will never become ambitious of depriving us of so natural a distinction as that of the palm of literature".¹ Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman roused the Critical reviewer to an open declaration of the male power and authority which had always been implicit in the permission granted to women to occupy a certain literary sphere: "Women we have often eagerly placed near the throne of literature: if they seize it, forgetful of our fondness, we can hurl them from it".²

Critics in this period, then, believed that by accepting and praising those women writers who were suitably feminine, they reserved the right to reject those who were not. Another way in which they hoped to regulate women's writing was by

¹Critical Review 31 (1771), 396.

²Critical Review 2nd ser. 5 (1792), 132.

limiting the numbers of women who were acceptable writers. The growing number of women writers was causing some unease soon after the middle of the century. One reviewer in 1762 felt that "the number of Authoresses hath of late so considerably increased", that women writers should no longer be treated with special tenderness.¹ Strictures on Female Education (1787), which the Critical Review greeted with enthusiasm, includes criticism of the large numbers of women writers. The review quotes the author's argument that women writers are only acceptable as permitted exceptions to a general rule:

It may be said, that England justly boasts many literary women. True. But who can say that they are not so many prodigies in their species, or that general rules admit not of exceptions? There are uncommon meteors in the planetary world. There are excentrick bodies in the heavens, which challenge our amazement.²

The Critical Review evidently agrees with this writer "that female literature, in this country, is swelled beyond its natural dimensions".³

To discourage this unnatural swelling, reviewers frequently recommended traditional female pursuits to women writers. "Fye, miss! indeed these pretty fingers may be better employed",⁴ was the belittling comment on one young woman's novel. The Monthly Review advised the author of Lady Almira Grantham, who complained that she had made little profit from her previous work, that more feminine work might be more profitable. "[W]e mean kindly to her in asking, whether she cannot use a needle in any mode, turn a spinning wheel, knit, touch a keyed instrument, or handle

¹Monthly Review 27 (1762), 472.

²Strictures on Female Education, quoted in Critical Review 64 (1787), 31.

³Strictures on Female Education, quoted in Critical Review 64 (1787), 32.

⁴Critical Review 68 (1789), 407.

a painting-brush, or any brush, as well as a pen?"¹ Probably she could, but the Monthly Review was being optimistic in believing that any of these female employments would earn her a living in the way that novel writing could. It was partly because there was so little profit to be gained with the needle that so many women took up the pen.

Criticisms of the neglect of female duties become more severe when the writer is not from the genteel, leisured classes. The "Farmer's Daughter in Gloucestershire" who wrote Virtue in Distress; or the History of Miss Sally Pruen and Miss Laura Spencer was castigated by the Critical Review. "When a farmer's daughter sits down to read a novel, she certainly mispends [sic] her time, because she may employ it in such a manner as to be of real service to her family: when she sits down to write one, her friends can have no hopes of her".² The Monthly Review, in 1758, believes that chambermaids "are now become free of the worshipful company of Adventure-makers",³ and in 1762, expresses fears that "our very Cook-wenches" will become writers.⁴ Such fears, probably disproportionate to the threat posed,⁵ show that critics wished to restrict the profession of authorship by class as well as by sex. The dismissal of The Life of Mr. John Van, a Clergyman's Son of Woody as a "Cheese-monger's History . . . in Cheese-monger's stile . . . only fit

¹Monthly Review 2nd ser. 9 (1792), 213.

²Critical Review 33 (1772), 327.

³Monthly Review 18 (1758), 183.

⁴Monthly Review 27 (1762), 472.

⁵R.D. Altick argues that eighteenth-century comments on the prevalence of novel-reading in the working-class were exaggerations, and that "it was among the middle class, rather than among the working people, that the taste for reading made headway during the eighteenth century". It seems unlikely that reviewers' fears of cooks and chambermaids writing novels were well-founded. The English Common Reader (1957; rpt. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p.. 41.

for Cheese-monger's use",¹ is an example of this class-based exclusion applied to a male writer.

The reviewers' claims to be particularly favourable to women's literary productions, and their readiness to praise a select number of women writers, tends to obscure their very restrictive definition of acceptable women's writing. To be acceptable in the second half of the eighteenth century, women's writing must come from the middle or upper classes, and it must support by precept and example the eighteenth-century standards of feminine virtue. It must show certain qualities such as ease, vivacity and tenderness, which critics nevertheless consider inferior to the qualities of style defined as masculine. Women writers must exhibit in their personal lives the proper feminine virtues, and in particular, the self-assertiveness associated with writing for publication must be minimized. Even important writers like Fanny Burney and Ann Radcliffe were praised as much for their modesty as for their achievements.² Finally, there must not be too many women writers. Women's writing gained respectability and acceptability in the second half of the eighteenth century, but only by being confined to this feminine sphere.

Perhaps the restriction that was least attended to was that of numbers. More and more women wrote, and the list of good writers whom it was incumbent upon critics to praise grew longer. The Monthly Review insisted that "every woman who has learnt to spell, is not a Cockburn, a Jones, a Carter, or a Lennox",³ and

¹Monthly Review 16 (1757), 284.

²One critic described Ann Radcliffe's imagination as "enriched by the more substantial excellence of amiable manners", and thought that in her "genius is accompanied by its best ornament, modesty" (Critical Review 2nd ser. 12 (1794), 360).

³Monthly Review 27 (1762), 472.

the Critical that "it seldom happens that ladies equal in genius to Lennox, Brookes, [sic] and Scott, figure in [novels]".¹ At the end of the century the Critical added that the "writings of a More, a Barbauld and a West, are monuments of well-directed genius",² while the New Lady's Magazine pointed out the impossibility of forgetting "the names of a Cockburn, a Rowe, a Montagu, a Carter, a Chapone, a More, and a Barbauld. . . . a Seward and a Williams. . . . a Burney".³ Such a large number of exceptions must have reduced confidence in the general rule.

While women writers throughout the period undermined by sheer force of numbers the notion that a writing woman was an exception, feminist writers towards the end of the century attacked the notion that women's writing should confine itself to a separate sphere. Mary Wollstonecraft in The Wrongs of Woman broke all the rules by defending the heroine's adultery. Charlotte Smith, less radical but also concerned with women's wrongs, defended a woman's right to discuss politics in the preface of Desmond. For this she was praised by Wollstonecraft in the Analytical Review,⁴ and also by the Monthly reviewer who was pleased to find novels "taking a higher and more masculine tone".⁵ The Monthly Review was at this time on the liberal side in politics and with this went an encouragement to women to abandon the restrictive eighteenth-century code of femininity. Thomas Holcroft, a reviewer for the Monthly Review in the early

¹Critical Review 27 (1769), 452.

²Critical Review 2nd ser. 26 (1799), 452.

³New Lady's Magazine 7 (1792), 12.

⁴See Analytical Review 13 (1792), 428-9. For a discussion of the attribution of reviews to Wollstonecraft, see below, p. 24.

⁵Monthly Review 2nd ser. 9 (1792), 406.

1790s, laments that the "courageous spirit of enquiry" is missing from works intended for young women. "Unfortunately for [women], the maxims of education at present will not admit them to overstep the precise and chilling confines of the governess's decorum".¹ The Analytical Review praised the work of feminists like Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, who were trying to alter these maxims of education.

By the end of the century, however, reaction against all kinds of revolutionism was firm, and the feminists' criticisms of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood were rejected along with other radical ideas. In 1799 the Monthly Review was once again praising^a woman's novel as "the effusion of a pure, virtuous and benevolent mind".² There remained for women writers the position which had been decidedly won during the second half of the century. This equivocal position, which offered women a way of earning money, respectability, and the possibility of literary fame, at the price of strict adherence to the feminine code, was the period's legacy to women writers of the nineteenth century. In effect the late eighteenth century had adopted the encouraging but patronizing maxim of Richardson, that a "pen is almost as pretty an implement in a woman's fingers, as a needle".³ Almost, but as the more conservative among the critics continually emphasized, not quite.

¹Monthly Review 2nd ser. 15 (1794), 108. This review is attributed to Holcroft on the basis of the signature 'Holc.', in ink, in the Bodleian Library copy of this volume. For Holcroft's connection with the Monthly Review see Nangle, The Monthly Review Second Series 1790-1815: Index of Contributors and Articles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 31-2.

²Monthly Review 2nd ser. 29 (1799), 89.

³Letter to Lady Bradshaigh, 1751, in Selected Letters, p. 184.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMAN NOVELIST AND THE DEFENCE OF THE FEMALE SEX

Women's writing has often been considered to be in itself a claim for women's rights. Women writers are frequently seen as spokeswomen for the rest of their sex. Pierre Fauchery points out that a woman writer "est une femme qui sort du silence de son sexe, qui 'prend' la parole: on est donc tenté de voir en elle un porte-parole de ce sexe".¹ The woman novelist in particular can be seen as a representative for other women. The novel's basis in social realities gives it opportunities for social criticism, and it can therefore be a vehicle for the expression of women's protests about their position in society. The women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century have special qualities which complicate any assessment of their position in the eighteenth-century debate about women's rights. We have seen that they are particularly concerned to present an idealized view of women, and that the new respectability of women novelists tends to restrict the scope of their work. Both factors are important when we come to consider the controversial question of the feminism or anti-feminism of their novels.

In his study of English women novelists from 1740 to 1800 Philippe Séjourné contends that they have a strong connection with feminism. The women novelists' message, he writes, is that men must reform their morals, and relinquish their absolute authority over women.² Wishing to defend women, the novelists choose heroines instead of heroes, and present women as

¹Fauchery, p. 101.

²"[L]'homme doit perdre son autorité absolue, ses mœurs grossières et ses manières sans élégance". Séjourné, p. 513.

oppressed, and surrounded by a hostile, male-dominated society.¹ The protests of these novelists, he argues, do not amount to a call to revolt, but represent what he calls "préféminisme" (Séjourné, p. 385). However, the protests which Séjourné describes may depend too heavily on an idealized view of womanhood to offer any real liberation to women. Irène Simon challenges Séjourné's thesis, maintaining that these women novelists with "leurs peintures des martyres du coeur, leur culte de la délicatesse des sentiments et de l'émotion" fortified a very restrictive view of woman's role. She accuses the novelists of "un mode d'expression et un type d'attitude qui, loin d'émanciper la femme, ont eu pour effet de lui faire accepter plus facilement des chaînes qui, pour être d'or, n'en restaient pas moins des chaînes".² Before examining some of the novels to test the accuracy of these conflicting claims it is useful to consider what feminism is in the eighteenth century. Is there a feminist tradition at all, and if there is, do the women novelists use it?

The position of women in society was one of the preoccupations of the eighteenth century. Changing social conditions and changing ideas about society encouraged a growth of interest in women's role. The Enlightenment philosophes were developing ideas on the basis of which "the doctrine of human and civil rights was built up as we know it in the eighteenth century".³

¹[E]lles voulaient défendre la femme, elles choisirent des héroïnes au lieu de héros . . . La femme, à leurs yeux, est une opprimée; on va donc la représenter dans sa faiblesse, en face de l'homme et de la société qui l'écrasent; elle vit perpétuellement dans un climat hostile". Séjourné, p. 282.

²"Le roman féminin en Angleterre au XVIII^e siècle", Études Anglaises 27 (1974), 206.

³Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment trans. Fritz C.A. Koelin and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 248.

The American Declaration of Independence and the French National Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of Man were based on these ideas of natural rights, ideas which Mary Wollstonecraft extended to women in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). At the same time the tone of English society was changing in an age which has been called "rightly proud of its 'improvement' in manners and its ripening sense of social duty".¹ A "growth of social compunction . . . became apparent in the last thirty years of the century, but had been developing from an earlier period".²

The eighteenth century was fond of equating improved civilization with better treatment of women. "It is certain, that savages . . . have seldom behaved to women with much respect or tenderness. . . . [but] in civilized nations they have ever been objects of both", wrote James Fordyce.³ Certainly some signs of increased tenderness and respect for women can be found in the eighteenth century. Changing social conditions, according to one historian, meant that the situation of women and children was somewhat improved. "Especially in the middle ranges of Western European society, the father's power over his children and the husband's power over his wife markedly declined", and "women and children secured new respect and new rights".⁴ Feminist ideas were debated by the philosophes. Diderot, Montesquieu and Voltaire argued that there was little difference between male and female mental capacity, and at the end of the

¹Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement: 1783-1867 (1959; rpt. London and New York: Longman, 1979), p. 13.

²Dorothy George, London Life in the XVIIIth Century (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., and New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 11.

³The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex, and the Advantages to be derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women (Dublin: S. Price, et. al. 1776), p. 9.

⁴Peter Gay, The Science of Freedom, Vol. 2 of The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (London: Wildwood House, 1973), p. 31 and p. 33.

century Condorcet argued that political and civil rights should be extended to women.¹ In England, a tradition of feminist writing began in the seventeenth century and continued throughout the eighteenth century.

Late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century feminist writing concentrates on the issue of better education for women.² Anna Schurman's The Learned Maid appeared in an English translation in 1659. Bathshua Makin's Essay to revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen was published in 1673. In her introduction to The Gentlewoman's Companion (1675), Hannah Wolley supported her plea for better education for women with the claim that "Mans Soul cannot boast of a more sublime Original than ours".³ This religious argument for the equality of male and female souls is supplemented later in the century by arguments from seventeenth-century philosophers. Locke's arguments against the existence of innate ideas in the mind are used in An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (1696).⁴ The author praises

¹For a discussion of the philosophes' relation to feminism, see Katherine B. Clinton, "Femme et Philosophe: Enlightenment Origins of Feminism", Eighteenth-Century Studies 8 (1974-5), 283-99.

²For a discussion of the writings of Anna Schurman, Bathshua Makin, Hannah Woolley, and other seventeenth-century feminist writers, see D.M. Stenton, The English Woman in History (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1957), Chapter VII, "The Beginnings of English Feminism".

³The Gentlewomans Companion; or, a Guide to the Female Sex (London: Printed by A. Maxwell for Edward Thomas, 1675), p. 1.

⁴The Essay has been attributed to Mary Astell. George Ballard mentions it as "a witty piece, commonly ascrib'd to [Mary Astell]". See Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1752), p. 449. Florence M. Smith concludes that it is not Astell's because it lacks her characteristic religious tone, and because in a catalogue of Edmund Curll's publications it is listed as written by Mrs. Drake, "probably a sister of Dr. James Drake". See Mary Astell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), pp. 175-6. The third edition of the Essay, published in 1697, contains a poem and a letter to the author by James Drake, and this suggests that the attribution to Mrs. Drake is probably correct. The British Library catalogue mentions as possible authors of the Essay Mary Astell, Judith Drake and Mrs. H. Wyatt.

Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)¹, and uses it as a basis for her own contention that male and female intellectual capacities are equal. She writes that she has heard "some learned Men maintain" that "all Souls are equal, and alike, and that consequently there is no such distinction, as Male and Female Souls; that there are no innate Idea's, but that all the Notions we have, are deriv'd from our External Senses, either immediately, or by Reflection" (An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, pp. 11-12). As men and women form their ideas from sensations in the same way -- and the author points out that according to physicians men and women show "no difference in the Organization of those Parts, which have any relation to, or influence over the Minds" (p. 12) -- it follows that their learning capacity is equal.

The argument that women's intelligence is equal to men's is prominent at the end of the seventeenth century. In A Serious Proposal to The Ladies (1694) Mary Astell suggests a "Religious Retirement" where women could concentrate on learning.² In his Essay Upon Projects (1697) Daniel Defoe criticizes the monastic nature of Astell's proposal, but agrees that the idea of an academy for women is a good one. Both Astell and Defoe base their arguments on the belief that it is education, not nature, which makes the difference between male and female minds. "Were the Men as much neglected, and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they wou'd be so far from surpassing those whom they now despise, that they themselves wou'd sink into

¹"The greatest difficulty we struggled with, was the want of a good Art of Reasoning, which we had not, that I know of, till that defect was supply'd by the greatest Master of that Art Mr. Locke, whose Essay on Human Understanding makes large amends for the want of all others in that kind". An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, p. 54.

²A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest, Part I, 3rd ed. (London: Printed by T.W. for R. Wilkin, 1696), p. 40.

the greatest stupidity and brutality", argues Astell (A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Pt.I, p. 15). Defoe writes that women "are taught to Read indeed, and perhaps to Write their Names, or so; and that is the heighth of a Woman's Education. And I wou'd but ask any who slight the Sex for their Understanding, What is a Man (a Gentleman, I mean) good for, that is taught no more?"¹

Arguments about the similarity of male and female minds lead not only to the campaign for women's education, but to comments which undermine the order of society. Male domination is criticized as having no legitimate authority:

Men being sensible as well of the Abilities of Mind in our Sex, as of the strength of Body in their own, began to grow Jealous, that we, who in the Infancy of the World were their Equals and Partners in Dominion, might in process of Time, by Subtlety and Stratagem, become their superiours; and therefore began in good time to make use of Force (the Origine of Power) to compell us to a Subjection, Nature never meant (Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, p. 21).

One feminist writer, "Sophia", claims that women would make capable rulers, generals, lawyers, and university professors:

[T]here is no science, office, or dignity, which Women have not an equal right to share in with the Men: Since there can be no superiority, but that of brutal strength, shewn in the latter; to entitle them to engross all power and prerogative to themselves: nor any incapacity proved in the former, to disqualify them of their right, but what is owing to the unjust oppression of the Men, and might be easily removed.²

¹"An Essay Upon Projects" in Selected Writings of Daniel Defoe ed. James T. Boulton (1965; rpt. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 32.

²Woman Not Inferior to Man (London: John Hawkins, 1739), p. 55. F.M. Smith points out that this work uses the arguments of The Woman as Good as the Man (1677), a translation of Poulain de la Barre's De L'Egalité des deux Sexes (1672). See Mary Astell, p. 177. "Sophia" has never been satisfactorily identified. D.M. Stenton suggests that Woman Not Inferior to Man, an answering essay, and "Sophia's" rejoinder, published together as Beauty's Triumph (London: J. Robinson, 1751), were all written by a male journalist. See The English Woman in History, p. 293.

"Sophia" contends that men have no right to their dominant position. "That they are our masters, they take it for granted; but by what title they are so, not one of them is able to make out" (p. 15). However, "Sophia" claims to have no "intention to stir up any of my own sex to revolt against the Men, or to invert the present order of things, with regard to government and authority" (p. 56). Similarly, Astell writes in her Serious Proposal to the Ladies that women use their education to the glory of God and will not wrest earthly power from male hands. "The Men . . . may still enjoy their Prerogatives for us, we mean not to intrench on any of their Lawful Privileges".¹ Despite these disclaimers it is clear that the feminist arguments of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries radically question the basis of masculine authority over women.

Mary Astell's arguments for women's liberation are based on seventeenth-century political developments. At the end of the century that had seen the execution of Charles I and the Glorious Revolution, she compares a king's power with a husband's power over his wife. She points out that kings can be deposed, but men consider themselves absolute monarchs in marriage:

He who has Sovereign Power does not value the Provocations of a Rebellious Subject, but knows how to subdue him with ease, and will make himself obey'd; but Patience and Submission are the only Comforts that are left to a poor People, who groan under Tyranny, unless they are Strong enough to break the Yoke, to Depose and Abdicate, which I doubt wou'd not be allow'd of here [i.e. in the case of marriage].²

At the end of the eighteenth century Wollstonecraft complains that revolutionary arguments for freedom and equality have not been applied to women. Astell's argument, though less sustained,

¹A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II (London: R.Wilkin, 1697), p. 290.

²Reflections Upon Marriage 3rd ed. (London: R.Wilkin, 1706), p. 27.

has a similar import. She criticizes seventeenth-century revolutionists for not extending their belief in freedom to women: "how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not Milton himself wou'd cry up Liberty to poor Female Slaves, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny" (Reflections Upon Marriage, p. 27). One question in the preface Astell wrote for the third edition of her Reflections would still be relevant after all the eighteenth-century struggles for freedom and the rights of man: "If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?"

There is then significant body of feminist polemic in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, posing searching questions about women's position in society and criticizing present modes of female education and marriage customs. Evidence of a widespread concern about women's rights can be found in the correspondence of many eighteenth-century women. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who became a friend of Mary Astell and was influenced by her feminist ideas,¹ included feminist arguments in some of her work written for publication.² Her private letters express her dissatisfaction with women's education. She complains that women are "educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle [sic] our natural reason; if some few get above their Nurses' instructions, our knowledge must rest conceal'd and be as useless to the World as Gold in the Mine".³ While few women approach a general criticism of masculine authority, they make many specific

¹See Robert Halsband, The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 117-8.

²See The Nonsense of Common Sense, no.2, December 27, 1737, and no.6, January 24, 1738; in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Essays and Poems and 'Simplicity, A Comedy', ed. R. Halsband and I. Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 109-13 and 130-34.

³To Lady Bute, 10 October 1753; in The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, ed. R. Halsband, Vol.III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 40.

complaints about the way women are treated. Women's learning is a favourite topic, and the bluestocking writers in the middle and later eighteenth century frequently comment on the injustice of denying education to women. Elizabeth Carter presents a description of a social occasion where women were cut off from educated conversation: "the gentlemen ranged themselves on one side of the room, where they talked their own talk, and left us poor ladies to twirl our shuttles . . . [the men] were discoursing on the old English poets, and this subject did not seem so much beyond a female capacity, but that we might have been indulged with a share in it".¹

Women also complained about the inequality of the sexes in courtship and marriage, and the custom of marriages arranged by parents for reasons of money and property. Mary Delany, who as a young girl was married against her will to Alexander Pendarves, a man she found "ugly and disagreeable",² was a particularly trenchant critic of marriage customs. "Why", she asks, "must women be driven to the necessity of marrying? a state that should always be a matter of choice! and if a young woman has not fortune sufficient to maintain her in the station she has been bred to, what can she do, but marry?"³ She points out that while female behaviour is constantly criticized and regulated, men are left unchecked: "many are the rules given for women's behaviour in the married state, and much might be addressed to the men; but you can't expect they will do it by one another, and they would exert their lordliness, should we presume to

¹Letter to Elizabeth Montagu, May 10, 1778; in Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu, III, 68.

²Autobiography and Correspondence, 1st ser., I, 24.

³To Mrs. Dewes, 16 March 1751; in Autobiography and Correspondence, 1st ser., III, 25.

prescribe to them".¹ Dissatisfaction with women's lot, then, is expressed not only in polemical works but in numerous private letters in the eighteenth century.

Eighteenth-century women novelists had a feminist tradition to draw on, and there are many instances of feminist protest in mid- and late-eighteenth-century novels. There is often a clear connection between early feminist polemic and the novelists' protests. Defence of female intelligence and demands for better education for women are frequently found in the novels. In Millenium Hall (1762) for example, Sarah Scott describes a community of learned ladies who demonstrate that women's intelligence equals men's, and provide visionary realisation of the female academy suggested by Mary Astell. The women novelists also echo Astell's complaints when they describe the problems women face in marriage. In Reflections Upon Marriage, Mary Astell writes:

Let the business [marriage] be carried as Prudently as it can be on the Woman's side, a reasonable Man can't deny that she has by much the harder bargain. Because she puts herself entirely into her Husband's Power, and if the Matrimonial Yoke be grievous, neither Law nor Custom afford her that redress which a Man obtains (p. 27).

In The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751) Eliza Haywood highlights the difficulties of the wife's position. Betsy's husband Munden first makes her miserable by his meanness and morose disposition, and later is unfaithful. Munden "considered a wife no more than an upper servant, bound to study and obey, in all things, the will of him to whom she had given her hand".² When she leaves him, Munden threatens to take her back and

¹To Mrs. Dewes, 31 March 1754; in Autobiography and Correspondence, 1st ser., III, 218.

²The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (London: T. Gardner, 1751), IV, 60.

imprison her, an action which would be within his legal rights. Betsy flees to avoid him. Her wise friend Lady Loveit approves of her decision to leave her husband, for "she thought if she had acted otherwise, it would have been an injustice not only to herself, but to all wives in general" (Betsy Thoughtless, IV, 237)

The writers of feminist tracts provide arguments in favour of women's equality with men, and criticize masculine authority over women. On some questions, however, they are less eloquent than the bluestockings and the women novelists. Astell criticizes marriage customs but recommends resignation and obedience to women,¹ while "Sophia" does not deal with the problem. Neither of them express indignation, as Mary Delany does, about women being forced into marriage. While some women novelists defend female intelligence and learning while paying little attention to women's emotions, others make central to their novels their defence of a woman's right to an emotional life, and in particular her right to choose her marriage partner. One character in Elizabeth Griffith's Lady Juliana Harley points out that there is something "extremely awful in the marriage contract, to a sensible and delicate mind. . . . think what she endures, who is compelled to make a 'joyless, loveless vow'"² A typical victim of parental authority is Lady H in Frances Brooke's novel Emily Montague, "sacrificed at eighteen, by the avarice and ambition of her parents, to age, disease, ill-nature, and a coronet".³ In making these protests the women novelists are closer to the tone of women's private letters of the

¹She then who Marrys ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her Husband must govern absolutely and intirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey". Reflections Upon Marriage, p. 56.

²The Story of Lady Juliana Harley (London: T. Cadell, 1776), I,

³The History of Emily Montague (London: J. Dodsley, 1769),²⁰⁴ III, 125.

eighteenth century than to the published feminist tracts. This shows that it is not only the tradition of feminist polemic which encourages their support of women, but a widespread sentiment among eighteenth-century women that their rights in the crucial questions of love and marriage were being ignored. Eighteenth-century feminism, then, has more than one form. There is a tradition of public argument about equality and education, and a more private tradition of expressing discontent with women's opportunities in love and marriage. Women novelists draw on both traditions.

Nearly all the women novelists of the second half of the eighteenth century include in their work criticism of the way women are treated in society. This does not necessarily mean their novels can be labelled feminist. We can get an indication of the difficulty of this issue by looking at the attitudes to women's role implied in Frances Sheridan's novel, Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761). In many ways Sidney illustrates Séjourné's argument that the women novelists' heroines are victims of oppression. She is the victim of a male-dominated society which subjects women to the authority of parents and then of husbands, allowing them no self-determination. Early in the novel Sidney is attracted to Orlando Faulkland and accepts his proposal of marriage. Sidney's mother, hearing that Faulkland has seduced and abandoned a Miss Burchell, considers that he is unworthy to marry Sidney. Sidney agrees, and rejects him. Soon afterwards, Sidney is exhorted to accept Mr. Arnold's proposal of marriage. Her mother uses an argument familiar to harassed eighteenth-century heroines. If she has forgotten her attachment to Faulkland there can be no difficulty in accepting another man, and if she refuses Arnold she proves herself void of self-control in allowing herself to love a man unworthy of her.

In fact, Sidney assures her correspondent Cecilia, she no longer thinks of Faulkland, but neither does she feel any attraction towards Arnold. "My heart is not in a disposition to love . . . I cannot compel it to like, and unlike, and like anew at pleasure" she complains.¹ There is no chance that Sidney will be allowed her wish of being left alone, and she "could cry for very vexation, to be made such a puppet of" (Sidney Bidulph, I, 144). Later, she writes that she married Arnold because she was "resolved in this, as in every other action of my life, to be determined by those to whom I owed obedience" (II, 64).

In the story of Sidney's courtship and marriage Frances Sheridan implies criticism of male attitudes to women. The first hint that Arnold is a man without due respect for women occurs in the scene where he proposes to Sidney. She reports his reaction when he finds her reading Horace:

do you prefer this to the agreeable e[n]tertainment of finishing this beautiful rose here, that seems to blush at your neglect of it? He spoke this, pointing to a little piece of embroidery that lay in a frame before me. I was nettled at the question, it was too assuming.

Arnold tries to placate Sidney by telling her "You are so lovely, madam, that nothing you can do needs an apology", but she finds flattery no substitute for respect. "An apology, I'll assure you! did not this look as if the man thought I ought to beg his pardon for understanding Latin?" she asks indignantly (I, 137). When Mary Astell expressed the hope that no gentleman "will hence-forward decry Knowledge and Ingenuity in her he would pretend to Honour; If he does, it may serve for a Test to distinguish the feigned and unworthy from the real Lover" (A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Pt. I, p.108), it might have been

¹Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph, Extracted from Her Own Journal, And now First Published (Dublin: G. Faulkner, 1761), I, 147.

a hint to eighteenth-century women novelists. Many of them, like Frances Sheridan, use the lover's attitude to female learning as a test of his worth.

After a couple of years of marriage there are further troubles in store for Sidney, and again they are caused by society's attitudes to women. Following the accepted double standard of sexual morality, Arnold considers himself entitled to keep a mistress, but when he suspects Sidney of planning secret meetings with her former suitor, he turns her out of their home and refuses to let her see her children. Once Arnold is convinced of Sidney's innocence, they are reconciled, but again Sidney's happiness is short-lived. Arnold dies. Faulkland marries Miss Burchell at Sidney's insistence. He discovers his wife with a lover, attacks the couple, and in the belief that he has killed his wife, begs Sidney to marry him. She agrees, mainly out of pity for his distracted state. He flees the country immediately after the wedding. Soon after, he learns that his first wife is still alive, and his own death, probably a suicide, follows. Sidney's chances of happiness are destroyed once again.

Sidney is partly the victim of misguided parental and tyrannical husbandly authority, and partly the victim of fate. The novel as a whole advocates her acceptance of the position of victim. Sidney's submissiveness is praised. Frances Sheridan's message is that parents should be obeyed, however mistaken or unkind they may be. Lady Grimston's daughter Mrs. de Vere, who has suffered because of her mother's opposition to her marriage, advises Sidney to follow Lady Grimston's and Mrs. Bidulph's advice and marry Arnold. Sidney believes she was right to marry Arnold from duty rather than inclination, for the woman's feelings are not a prime consideration in marriage. "I

esteemed him; a sufficient foundation, in the person of a husband, whereon to build love" she declares (II, 65). She was right to submit to her husband's ill-treatment, and to condone his infidelity, for "a woman certainly ought not to marry a loose man, if she knows him to be such; but if it be her misfortune to be joined to such a one, she is not to reject him" (II, 45). Sidney's unhappiness proves that virtue is not rewarded in this world. While many of her troubles clearly arise from women's position in society, others are best interpreted as visitations of providence. Sidney declares, "I have been set up as a mark . . . let me fulfil the intention of my Maker, by shewing a perfect resignation to His will" (II, 402). The world which treats Sidney so unkindly must be accepted because it is ordained by God, and it "is ignorant, as well as sinful, to arraign his providence" (I, 5). Fauchery contends that eighteenth-century writers, by presenting women's problems as their unavoidable destiny, made women more inclined to accept their situation.¹ By portraying her heroine as a martyr to the womanly virtues Frances Sheridan implies that virtuous women will accept their position in society. Her novel supplies evidence for P.M. Spacks's argument that women novelists in the eighteenth century "employ the writing of novels to affirm the social order that limits them".²

The eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood clearly affects the portrayal of Sidney. We have already seen that women novelists in the eighteenth century adopt the new ideal of womanhood with particular enthusiasm, and consider the ideal

¹"On lui a rendu inévitable et peut-être supportable sous le nom de destin ce qu'elle eût difficilement toléré sous celui de condition". Fauchery, p. 854.

²Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 57.

eighteenth-century woman as an argument for women's dignity. In many cases, however, the qualities attributed to the ideal woman are the virtues of chastity and obedience traditionally recommended to them, and the new praise of womanhood offers no liberation to women. In Sidney Bidulph one particular aspect of the ideal eighteenth-century woman is emphasized: her moral excellence, defined as an endless capacity for self-denial. Sidney gives an accurate description of her own character when she is under pressure to marry Arnold. "Fain would I bring myself chearfully to conform to my mother's will, for I have no will of my own. I never knew what it was to have one, and never shall, I believe; for I am sure I will not contend with a husband" (I, 147). Frances Sheridan's presentation of a virtuous heroine without a will of her own shows that her attitude is close to that of most eighteenth-century books on female conduct, which also stress the moral qualities of the ideal woman. They praise women for natural virtues which make a woman worthy of respect, but recommend obedience to parents and to husbands, and a general acceptance of a subordinate position. James Fordyce sums up this ethic of simultaneous exaltation and subordination of the eighteenth-century woman by advising her: "It is thine, thou fair form, to command by obeying, and by yielding to conquer".¹

Many women novelists in the second half of the eighteenth century show attitudes similar to Frances Sheridan's. Idealization of women's moral excellence is often combined with a positive recommendation of their subordination. In one of Sophia Briscoe's novels, a virtuous woman who "all angel as she was, could yet do her duty, with chearfulness and inclination,

¹Sermons to Young Women II, 261.

to a man much her inferior", proves women's moral superiority while confirming acceptance of her social inferiority.¹ Other virtues ascribed to women could also be instrumental in their continued subordination. The praise given to modesty, for example, personified in Susannah Minifie's characters, "Lady Elizabeth and her amiable sister Sophia", who "strive to hide every perfection they possess",² hardly encourages women to assert the claim to greater dignity given them by the ideal of womanhood. Indeed, idealization of women often implies that the woman who deserves a better place in society is the woman who will never demand it.

Another way in which the idealization of women in the women's novels works against any feminist element in the novels is in linking female attractiveness with female weakness. In Sophia Briscoe's Miss Melmoth, the heroine is the more beautiful for a "soft languor in her eyes" that implies her weakness (Miss Melmoth, I, 3). One of Elizabeth Griffith's female characters has a sickly countenance which is "infinitely more interesting, than the most healthful glow of beauty in its highest bloom".³ Such praises of weakness lead to the acceptance, and even glorification, of women's position as victims. "[T]o be a victim, as these women saw it, is to gain rather than lose in dignity",⁴ and this is demonstrated in Frances Brooke's use of a quotation from Young to explain why Emily Howard's "very paleness has a thousand charms". Weakness and distress are attractive because woman is:

¹Miss Melmoth; or, the New Clarissa (London: T. Lowndes, 1771), I, 105.

²Barford Abbey, a Novel: in a Series of Letters (London: T. Cadell, and J. Payne, 1768), I, 189.

³The History of Lady Barton 2nd ed. (London: T. Davies and T. Cadell, 1774), II, 69.

⁴Tompkins, p. 134.

'So properly the object of affliction,
That Heaven is pleas'd to make distress become her,
And dresses her most amiably in tears'.¹

Séjourné argues that the women novelists' presentation of women as oppressed victims demonstrates a feminist intention. However, this presentation is often anti-feminist in its implications because it tends to encourage acceptance of oppression.

J.J. Richetti, writing about women novelists of the early eighteenth century, claims that in their novels "the myth of persecuted innocence . . . is deeply conservative and explicitly careful to avoid the implicit subversive possibilities it contains".² His assessment applies equally to the persecuted heroines of late-eighteenth-century women novelists. In many ways the women novelists' use of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood works against any endeavours to emancipate women.

The feminism of the women's novels is restricted because, although they make protests about women's condition similar to those Mary Astell makes, they do not base their arguments on her radical contention that there is no sex in souls, but on eighteenth-century idealizations of womanhood which grant women a high status because of the natural virtues of the feminine mind. Thus women must preserve those virtues to gain their right to approval. As Jean Hagstrum remarks, "one of the mischiefs of the sentimental exaltation of woman is that in the real world it does not exalt her at all".³ However, the idealized view of womanhood was so widespread, and so widely believed to be a more enlightened view of women, that feminists appealed to it in their writings. Some early feminist works

¹The History of Lady Julia Mandeville ed. Phillips Poole (London: Scholartis Press, 1930), pp. 208-9.

²Popular Fiction Before Richardson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 208.

³Sex and Sensibility (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 164.

are also early examples of the idealized view of women. In spite of her own arguments for equality and for the similarity of male and female minds, the author of Defence of the Female Sex writes that "there is a tender Softness in the Frame of our Minds, as well as in the Constitution of our Bodies, which inspire Men, a Sex more rugged, with the like Sentiments, and Affections, and infuses gently and insensibly a Care to oblige, and a Concern not to offend us" (Defence of the Female Sex, p. 143). Writing before the eighteenth-century idealization of womanhood has prevailed over the misogynist view, she finds idealization useful because it offers a nobler picture of female nature than the received view. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, when this idealized picture is itself the received view, its shortcomings are more obvious. Mary Wollstonecraft emphatically repudiates it in her feminist writings, attacking the ideal of natural womanly qualities and denying "the existence of sexual virtues".¹ She warns that "the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex . . . are most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise the very weakness they cherish" (The Rights of Woman, p. 145). Her attacks on idealized views of women sometimes seem almost like attacks on women themselves. "Women are supposed to possess more sensibility . . . than men . . . but the clinging affection of ignorance has seldom anything noble in it", she writes (p. 312). Such statements should be seen in their context as reactions against the idealized picture of women's virtues presented by many eighteenth-century writers, which becomes, sometimes with and sometimes contrary to the author's intention, an argument

¹A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), p. 139.

against any need for change in women's status.

The sentimental idealization of womanhood is more evident in the second than the first half of the eighteenth century, and its anti-feminist implications are also clearer then. Novels of the second half of the century lack some of the feminist elements found earlier in the century. One of the reasons for this is that in the second half of the century it is necessary for the heroine to conform to the sentimental ideal of womanhood. Defoe's *Roxana* considers that a woman with money of her own is foolish to marry and thereby give her husband control of her fortune. She is willing to be mistress to a Dutch merchant, but not to marry him: "I had no need to give him twenty Thousand Pound to marry me, which had been buying my Lodging too dear a great deal", she explains.¹ Because she is outside the pale of conventional morality, *Roxana* is able to make comparisons between men's and women's situations which would not be available to respectable women. With money and without conventional morality, she points out, a woman, like a man, can choose a partner simply for sexual pleasure. She tells the Dutch merchant "that it was my Opinion, a Woman was as fit to govern and enjoy her own Estate, without a Man, as a Man was, without a Woman; and that, if she had a-mind to gratifie herself as to Sexes, she might entertain a Man, as a Man does a Mistress" (*Roxana*, p. 149). Defoe does not mean to imply full approval of *Roxana*'s attitude. He makes *Roxana* confess that "if ever Woman in her Senses rejected a Man of Merit, on so trivial and frivolous a Pretence, I was the Woman: but surely it was the most preposterous thing that ever Woman did" (p. 157). The point is that *Roxana*'s attitude could not be presented with any hint of sympathy later in the century, when

¹*Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* ed. Jane Jack (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 144.

the heroines of male and female novelists are chaste. Later heroines, though their unhappy marriages might form the basis for criticism of a husband's powers, were unable to make Roxana's radical criticisms of marriage as an institution.

The idealized heroine placed restrictions on all novelists of the later eighteenth century, but particularly on women novelists, who had not only their heroines' honour but their own respectability to consider. The new respectability of the woman novelist combines with her adoption of the idealized view of women to restrict her range of expression. Women novelists early in the century, such as Mary Delarivière Manley and Eliza Haywood, had much greater freedom. In "The Fair Hypocrite" (1720) Manley takes as her theme the unfulfilled sexual desires of her heroine, who becomes dissatisfied with her unconsummated marriage to the impotent old Duke of Savoy. Manley explains that her heroine had been married at fifteen, but "was now arrived to a more advanced Age . . . [and] those dangerous Desires, whereof the King her Father had warned her, began to invade her Blood".¹ Having seen the picture and heard of the virtues of the Duke of Mendoza, she becomes obsessed with the idea of meeting him and goes on a pilgrimage so that she can visit Spain and see him. She sees him and falls in love, but decides to return to her husband. She is punished for the hypocrisy of her pilgrimage when she is falsely accused of adultery, but finally love is rewarded. Her husband dies and she marries Mendoza. In the reconciliation scene between them, the heroine's passion is evident when "letting herself fall into the Duke's Arms, she join'd her Mouth to his with such Ardour, as if she would attract his Soul to meet with hers that now

¹"The Fair Hypocrite" Novel I of The Power of Love: In Seven Novels (London: C. Davis, 1741), p. 29.

seemed to hover on her Lips" ("The Fair Hypocrite", p. 139). Such descriptions of and evident approval of female sexuality earned Manley her licentious reputation, and in the second half of the century this freedom of description was barred to most women novelists. In fact women novelists in the late eighteenth century almost deny that their heroines are sexual beings. While Richardson's heroines, for all their purity, are certainly women with women's bodies, the heroines of Richardson's imitators often appear to have no body apart from their soulful eyes and pale complexions. Their much-praised delicacy almost deprives them of bodily existence. The moral role of the woman novelist, firmly established by the late eighteenth century, is an important factor determining the prevalence of the new sexless heroine.

Her greater freedom in writing of passionate women does not mean that Manley is necessarily more feminist than later women novelists. Her stories of the dreadful vengeance visited on faithless wives, for example, do much to reinforce female subordination.¹ However, in ignoring or denying female sexuality the later, more respectable women novelists were helping establish an ideal of womanhood which denied full humanity to women. Moreover, the earlier female novelists' descriptions of sexual encounters and seductions, only hinted at by later women novelists, give greater force to their cries against men's perfidy when the lover deserts. Unable to treat these themes of sexuality and seduction, except in euphemisms and with reference to minor characters, women novelists of the late eighteenth century were unable to express the degree of sympathy for fallen women which had been common earlier in the century.

¹See her two stories entitled "The Husband's Resentment", Novels IV and V in The Power of Love.

The last point is underlined by an article by Frances Clements on feminism in the eighteenth-century novel. She writes that "[a] selection of novels from the years immediately following the publication of Pamela . . . shows that a concern for women's rights is central and that these novels make the same demands for women that Mary Wollstonecraft was to make some fifty years later".¹ The numerous stories of girls threatened with force to make them marry, of mistreated wives, and the sympathetic portraits of prostitutes in the novels she names illustrate her point. Two things are significant about her choice of examples. One is that they are taken from novels of the 1740s and 1750s, not from the 1760s and 1770s. In the later decades sentimental idealization had become a much stronger convention, with the result that oppressed virgins and wives protested less vigorously, and sympathetic prostitutes almost disappeared. The other is that the stories of girls forced into prostitution or sympathetically portrayed as prostitutes all occur in novels written by men. Examples are Nanny in Edward Kimber's Life and Adventures of Joe Thompson (1750), Miss Williams in Smollett's Roderick Random, Polly Gunn in William Chaigneau's History of Jack Connor (1752), and Fanny Thoroughgood in John Shebbeare's Marriage Act (1754). By the middle of the eighteenth century, as the respectability of women novelists became established, this topic was closed to them.

In the last two decades of the eighteenth century sympathetic attitudes to seduced women are expressed once more. Robert Bage's seduced female characters do not, like so many late-century fictional victims, retire to convents or die, but live, prosper, and marry. In Barham Downs (1784), Kitty Ross, after

¹"The Rights of Women in the Eighteenth-Century Novel", Enlightenment Essays 4 (1973), no. 3-4, 63.

being seduced by Mr. Corrane, marries the hero's friend Wyman. The hero's remark about another seduced girl, Molly Patterson, reveals Bage's attitude: "what a load of anxiety has she to endure, because the laws of nature and society are at variance".¹ Women novelists with equally liberal intentions are more inhibited by their respectability. Charlotte Smith presents a sympathetic account of an adultress, Adelina, in Emmeline (1788), allowing her to survive her husband and hinting that she will marry her lover, but only after a melodramatic repentance which has almost led to her death. Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays present a more thorough vindication of sexual feelings in women, but they achieve this by rejecting the woman novelist's respectability and the sentimental idealization of womanhood. Most women novelists towards the end of the century, conforming to their new respectable role and accepting the idealization of womanhood, are correspondingly restricted in their range of expression.

The woman novelist's moral role and the sentimental idealization of womanhood work together to uphold existing social conventions in the late eighteenth century. Protests about women's place in society, and sympathy for those who breach society's strict code of female conduct, are deprived of their strength, as women novelists preach submission to authority and resignation to a hard lot. It has been suggested that the sentimental novel, which is often subversive in its implications when a hero is its focal point, is less likely to be so when it centres on a heroine. The sentimental heroine's role "conforms to the popular sense of what a young lady should be; — the sentimental hero poses an implicit challenge to accepted notions

¹Barham Downs (London: G. Wilkie, 1784), II, 189.

of masculinity, and cannot be assimilated into the world represented in the novels".¹ Thus the "glorification of sentimental heroines posed no such artistic or ideological challenge as the idealization of sentimental heroes" (Starr, p. 524). A sentimental hero like Mackenzie's man of feeling becomes an outsider because his very existence is a challenge to society's assumptions, while a sentimental heroine like Fanny Burney's Evelina can accept and be accepted by society as it is (pp. 524-527). Thus the women novelists, who usually centre their sentimental novels on heroines, tend to write novels with a conservative view of society.

Starr's argument suggests that there are subversive possibilities in the sentimental novel which the typical woman's sentimental novel ignores. The argument could be broadened to suggest that the women novelists' moral role and their idealization of womanhood mean that their novels do not contain a certain radical re-appraisal of society which characterizes the eighteenth-century novel as a whole. Frederick Karl argues that the eighteenth-century novel is a subversive genre, which is radical in its suggestion of new ideas.

The novel is an offshoot from an established society and literature; it protests against closed forms; and it proselytizes for a community based on dignity, acceptance, equality, and virtue through achievement, not birth. . . . [It suggests] a society in which almost infinite changes and variations are possible, and desirable. For this reason, we have called the early novel subversive, for it was nearly always testing out the received and the given, attacking hypocrisy, and demonstrating alternative ways of action and response.²

Many of the qualities which make the novel a forum for "new and

¹G.A. Starr, "'Only a Boy': Notes on Sentimental Novels", Genre 10 (1977), 501.

²A Reader's Guide to the development of the English novel in the eighteenth century (New York, 1974; rpt. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 39.

often dangerous ideas" (Karl, p. 5) are less evident in women's sentimental novels of the eighteenth century than in other eighteenth-century novels. Rather than favouring a society based on equality many women novelists support aristocracy by placing their novels in high society and marrying their heroines to lords. Rather than presenting change and variation as desirable, they often reinforce old patterns of parental authority, marital order, and social rank. Irène Simon accuses the women novelists of the period of snobbishness, writing that they confined their scenes largely to the upper classes, and that in their work "l'esprit de classe se manifeste bien plus nettement que chez les auteurs masculins".¹ Instead of ridiculing parental authority, easing strict notions of good and evil, and supporting bourgeois against aristocratic values, as the eighteenth-century literary realist is said to do (Karl, p. 14), most of the women novelists support notions of filial duty, present morality in strict black-and-white terms, and mock vulgar moneyed citizens. J.M.S. Tompkins links respectability in novels to rejection of many of its progressive elements, writing that those novelists who imitated Smollett's picaresque "nourished the democratic, realistic and humorous elements in the basement of English fiction, while the majority of respectable novelists were taking tea with the ladies in the drawing-room above".² Karl's favourite example of the eighteenth-century hero is the picaro, who amply demonstrates the subversive possibilities the novel contains. The subversive element in the novel, he writes, is its presentation of "the alternative or adversary line based on the adventurer, dreamer, iconoclast, idealist, destroyer of stability and moderation, represented by

¹Simon, "Le roman féminin," p. 211.

²Tompkins, p. 44.

the Don and in later fiction by picaro, pirate, criminal, libertine, and artist" (p. 54), but certainly not by the women novelists' idealized sentimental heroine.

It is not only the woman novelist's respectable role nor her adoption of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood which creates this situation. Another significant factor is the woman novelist's adherence to romantic conventions. We have already seen that the women novelists' particular version of the ideal of womanhood is coloured by romance, particularly by seventeenth-century French romances. The world the women novelists create is often a world of romance rather than a realistic picture of contemporary society. The setting is often contemporary London or a country house, and the balls, card-parties, coach journeys and visits are contemporary social details, but the underlying theme is usually the ideal heroine and her relation to a lover -- the theme of romance. The tendency of some women novelists to people their novels almost entirely with dukes, duchesses, lords and ladies, is partly a reflection of this preoccupation with romance. These writers, far from basing their picture of society on their own experience, are creating an ideal social world in which the heroine's romance can flourish. Arnold Kettle writes that the novel's realism and its capacity for social criticism are connected, while romance, on the other hand,

builds, for the edification and pleasure of those unfortunate to find themselves outside the privileged élite, a fantasy, a pseudo-world, seductive or sad, delightful or horrible, which has one unfailing quality: that, however remote it may be from reality, the values and attitudes it incorporates are such as are least likely to undermine the theories and practice of class society.¹

¹An Introduction to the English Novel, Volume I (1951; rpt. London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1974), p. 30.

It can be seen that the elements of romance in the women's novels of the late eighteenth century work in this way to provide escapist fantasy, and preclude critical assessment of the realities of women's place in society. Romantic convention and idealization had similar effects on other women writers in the eighteenth century. Shirley Jones writes that French women novelists of the 1730s wrote historical novels as a form of escapism, being "content to shine in those realms of fiction where reality was rejected in favour of what could only ironically be termed history, since it represents a flight from reality".¹ This escapism is linked to their glorification of women, and Jones notes that in Mme de Tencin's Le Siege de Calais, "the choice of thematic material, motivated by the desire to present an idealized view of women, was precisely the factor which inhibited any discussion of the position of women in reality -- the reality of eighteenth-century society". This is the dilemma "of all women novelists during the eighteenth century" (Jones, pp. 215-216).

An example of how romance conventions work against social criticisms can be found in Charlotte Lennox's novel Henrietta (1758). Unlike many eighteenth-century women novelists, Charlotte Lennox presents a fairly detailed social world, and concerns herself with her heroine's problems in earning a living. Henrietta's father was the son of an earl, who disinherited him for marrying a woman without fortune. When her parents die Henrietta is left destitute. For a time she lives with a rich relative, Lady Meadows, but Lady Meadows wants her to convert to Roman Catholicism and marry a Roman Catholic baronet of sixty.

¹"Madame de Tencin: an Eighteenth-Century Woman Novelist", in Eva Jacobs, W.H. Barber, Jean H. Bloch, F.W. Leakey, and Eileen Le Breton, eds., Woman and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: Essays in Honour of John Stephenson Spink (London: Athlone Press, 1979), p. 215.

Henrietta hears that she is to be sent to a French nunnery if she refuses, so she runs away from Lady Meadows's home and goes to London. There her struggle to maintain dignity and self-respect intensifies. She has trouble finding reputable lodgings and is pursued by a young nobleman who wants to seduce her. Having lost Lady Meadows's favour and protection, Henrietta has to go out to service to earn her living. Her various situations as waiting woman to Miss Cordwain, a rich citizen's daughter, and then to old and vain Mrs. Autumn, are described in comic detail. It is while she is in Paris as waiting woman to a Miss Belmour that she meets the young nobleman whom eventually, after many vicissitudes, she marries.

In many ways Henrietta is anti-romantic in intention. Various romantic conventions are satirized. Intense sentimental friendship between young women, for example, is deflated in the portrayal of Henrietta's confidante Miss Woodby, who is ugly, ridiculous and hypocritical. However, anti-romantic satire is undercut by the outcome of the plot, which is thoroughly in accordance with romantic convention. For example, when Henrietta enters into the mundane task of domestic service, Lennox mocks her romantic aspirations, writing that Henrietta

could not help fancying herself the future heroine of some affecting tale, whose life would be varied with surprising vicissitudes of fortune; and that she would at last be raised to a rank as much above her hopes, as the station she was now entering upon was below all that her fears had ever suggested.¹

The point of the mockery is lost when we consider that Henrietta is the heroine of a tale, that her life is varied with surprising vicissitudes of fortune, and that she is eventually raised to a high rank. This plot is typical of romance, and it destroys

¹Henrietta (London: A. Millar, 1758), II, 36.

the credibility of Charlotte Lennox's social criticism. At one point she criticizes the snobbishness of Lord B--'s mother, who cannot believe that a girl in Henrietta's humble position can be genuinely indignant at Lord B--'s dishonourable proposals:

Had the countess known it was the niece of the earl of --, who expressed herself in such lofty terms, she would have admired that becoming pride, which suggested them; but in the waiting-maid of miss Cordwain, it appeared absurd and ridiculous, and she was ready to suspect her of artifice and dissimulation (Henrietta, II, 79).

The power of this as social criticism is destroyed by the fact that Henrietta is the niece of the earl of --, and it is her noble birth which, in true romance fashion, makes her manifestly superior to the situation in which she is placed. When Henrietta goes to apply for the job of waiting-maid to Miss Cordwain we are told that "no apparel, however mean, could have hid that noble air, or disguised that native elegance, so conspicuous throughout her whole person" (II, 32). By this romantic idealization of her high-born heroine Charlotte Lennox confirms an aristocratic view of society shared by many late-eighteenth-century women novelists in England. Like the French women novelists studied by Shirley Jones, they show a "conservatism and escapism" which "precluded them from playing a role of any importance in forging the novel into a weapon of revolt" (Jones, p. 217).

The novelists' limitations as social critics correspond to their limitations as feminist writers. Their appeals for recognition of women's intelligence and virtues are usually feminist in intention, but because they advocate acceptance of existing social institutions their endeavours to improve women's lot are strictly limited. At the same time, however, there are feminist implications in certain aspects of the women's novels

at this time that are not found in the otherwise more subversive picaresque genre. Frederick Karl claims that picaresque fiction offers women a more favourable position than more genteel novels:

Paradoxically, the picaro allows more democracy to women than we find in more genteel fictions, where women are exalted so that men may be chivalrous. Since picaresque involves, almost, a warring society, women take on strong roles, as pioneer women always have; and while they remain somewhat mysterious and hooded beings, they do manifest human needs and desires. They are, however, allowed little consciousness (Karl, p. 19).

The argument is not entirely convincing. The picaresque novel may contain some feminist implications lacking in most sentimental novels, because of its favourable presentations of women outcast from society for breaching its code of sexual morality. The sympathetic portraits of prostitutes cited by Frances Clements are in picaresque novels. In other ways, the picaresque lacks the sentimental novel's potential for feminism, simply because the picaresque novelist is less interested in female characters. Women's strong roles in picaresque may be a welcome antidote to their passivity in many sentimental novels, but the fact that they are mysterious and hooded beings suggests that they are being presented without great insight.

The crux of the matter is revealed in Karl's statement that women in picaresque "are, however, allowed little consciousness". It is the importance given to women's consciousness in the women's sentimental novels that gives them such potential as critical commentaries on women's position in society. Especially in the epistolary novel, where the heroine's thoughts and feelings, and those of other women, are given direct expression, women take on an importance which is never theirs in picaresque novels. While the women novelists often explicitly endorse woman's subordinate position in society, the importance they give to the expression

of women's thoughts, hopes and fears implicitly challenges that subordinate position.

In fact, the idealization of women found in the women's novels, both in its continuation of romantic tradition and in its emphasis on female moral qualities, is of ambiguous significance. It can be used to keep women in their subordinate place, but that is not its only use. The importance given to romantic love in novels, for example, offers a certain vision of liberation to eighteenth-century women. This is one reason why the novel is held in such disrepute by writers of female conduct books in the eighteenth century. Hester Chapone, for example, warns young women not to read novels because they tend "to inflame the passions of youth, whilst the chief purpose of education should be to moderate and restrain them".¹

This point of dispute between the ethics of the novel and of the female conduct-book is important because it is the main difference between them. As Joyce Hemlow points out, conduct- or courtesy-books and novels become very numerous and popular at the same time and for similar reasons -- both offer guides for women's behaviour.² In many ways they coincide in advising women to be dutiful and obedient. Fordyce writes that "disobedience to parents is unnatural and vile" (Sermons to Young Women, I, 124). "The utmost failure in a parent's duty, for a duty is certainly owing from them, does not excuse the slightest breach in that of a child; who owes to them its existence" agree the novelists Margaret and Susannah Minifie.³ Conduct books and novels advocate female decorum. John Gregory

¹Letters on the Improvement of the Mind (Dublin: J. Exshaw et. al., 1773), II, 204.

²See her "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books", PMLA 65 (1950), 732-761.

³The Histories of Lady Frances S-- , and Lady Caroline S-- II, 14-15.

tells his daughters that there is a "certain propriety of conduct peculiar to your sex",¹ while a character in one of Susannah Minifie's novels insists that "[p]roper decorums must be observed by that sex. -- Are not those despicable who neglect them?" (Barford Abbey, I, 114).

On the question of romantic love, however, conduct books and novels nearly always disagree. Women novelists of the late eighteenth century, more reticent than earlier women novelists, do not attribute sexual desire to their heroines, but their dependence on the love-story does undermine to some extent the moral stance which would deny passion. Romantic love is all-important to their plots, and if their heroines are not allowed passions, they are at least praised for a sensibility that implies a capacity for love. Fanny in Barford Abbey is praised for telling the hero that she loves him. "How reverse from this innocence, this greatness, is the prudish hypocrite, who forbids even her features to say she is susceptible of love!" (Barford Abbey, II, 153). This is the opposite of Gregory's belief that women, "at least in this part of the world", are not troubled with passions. "What is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex . . . a woman in this country has very little probability of marrying for love", he writes (A Father's Legacy, p. 46).

Gregory, though he promises not to tell his daughters whom they should marry (p. 70), does not believe that women suffer from their lack of choice in marriage, as nature has given them "a greater flexibility of taste [than men] on this subject" (p. 47). The women's sentimental novels disagree entirely, and

¹A Father's Legacy p. 5.

portray heroines who fall in love and suffer deeply if they cannot marry the man of their choice. The novelists' championship of a woman's right to love is particularly important because this is a right generally ignored by writers of eighteenth-century feminist tracts, who concentrate on education. Mary Astell dismisses the problem of how an inhabitant of her female academy, living in strict seclusion from men, is to find a husband. Her parents can recommend a suitable husband, a procedure which should be quite acceptable to the young woman, "She who has none but innocent affections, being easily able to fix them where Duty requires" (A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Pt. I, pp. 99-100). In comparison to this recommendation, even a novel like Sidney Bidulph, which presents its heroine as a model of virtue because she follows duty rather than love, can be seen as a plea for women's right to love. The whole plot turns on Sidney's unhappiness in love, thus implying that love is more important than conduct-book writers would have their readers believe.

The women's sentimental novels usually teach that daughters should be allowed to refuse a man proposed by their parents, while parents should have the power to refuse consent to a daughter's choice of husband. This is also the position taken by many conduct-books in the late eighteenth century, and it has been suggested that novelists supporting a woman's right to refusal influenced public opinion sufficiently to change the attitudes of the typical conduct-book.¹ Whether this can be attributed to the novelists or not, it is certain that in placing such importance on women's feelings the love-stories of women novelists of the late eighteenth century have something of a

¹See Madeleine Blondel, Images de la femme dans le roman anglais de 1740 à 1771 (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1976) p. 438.

feminist message.

The women novelists' attribution of moral superiority and moral influence to women is also an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand it means that they apply a very restrictive moral standard to women's behaviour. To retain their moral superiority women must be dutiful, obedient, endlessly forgiving, self-sacrificing, and pure. On the other hand, by emphasizing that such a woman can and should influence men, the novelists imply criticism of normal standards of masculine behaviour. The rakes who reform under the influence of a virtuous woman are testimony to the novelists' desire to criticize men's sexual conduct. In their estimation, a virtuous woman's influence is so great that by loving her a man automatically improves his character. One man saved from the usual sins associated with masculinity is Cleveland in Lady Barton, who, without great wisdom or strong principles of virtue, lives a good and chaste life because he has "a strong, but chaste passion, for a woman of merit . . . than which, nothing in nature more elevates the mind, improves the understanding, refines the manners, and purges the affections of man" (Lady Barton, II, 200). The women novelists of the late eighteenth century often consider their hero's chastity as an important matter. They are carrying the concept of the virtuous woman's moral influence to its logical conclusion and beginning to demand the same standards of virtue in men as in women.

They also write with approval of men who partake of the sensibility, modesty and delicacy of the virtuous woman. Evelina's admiration of Lord Orville is founded on the belief that he is not only honourable and amiable, but feminine in his delicacy.¹ The hero of Emily Montague is superior to other men

¹Fanny Burney, Evelina, ed. Edward A. Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 261.

because of his "almost feminine sensibility" (Emily Montague, II, 40). This admiration for men of delicate sensibility leads to an interesting reversal of sexual roles in Sophia Briscoe's Miss Melmoth. Lord Wilton married a woman he disliked because his father threatened to disinherit him if he did not, and the prospective bride refused to listen to his pleas that she give up her claim to him. "The unfortunate Lord Wilton was thus made a victim to the licentious passion of a vile woman: for could her attachment merit a better title? certainly not" (Miss Melmoth, I, 26). Lord Wilton is in the usually feminine position of victim, and his misfortunes are compounded by the fact that, like any sentimental heroine, he has "a heart formed with the utmost sensibility, tenderly susceptible to the woes of others" (I, 26-7). While the condemnation of his wife shows the use of the ideal of womanhood to recommend female passivity, the feminization of Lord Wilton demonstrates the women novelists' extension of ideals of womanly behaviour to men. The hero of one of Mackenzie's novels declares: "There is a little world of sentiment made for women to move in, where they certainly excel our sex, and where our sex, perhaps, ought to be excelled by them".¹ The women novelists agree that women excel in the world of sentiment, but their endeavour is to extend this world to include men as well.

The relation of the women's novels of the late eighteenth century to eighteenth-century feminist thought is a complex one. The women novelists appear in some ways far more conservative than their male contemporaries, while in other ways they make quite bold claims for sexual equality. The implications of their idealized view of womanhood are difficult to assess. Leslie Fiedler is doubtless partly right when he criticizes the

¹Julia de Roubigné 2nd ed. (London: W. Strahan, T. Cadell, and W. Creech, 1778), II, 75.

idealized view of women, writing that the "imposition of the Clarissa-image on the young girl represents an insidious form of enslavement . . . the final attempt to imprison woman within a myth of Woman".¹ Yet he describes the women's sentimental novel, which is the most insistent in imposing this Clarissa-image, as feminist, and there is also some truth in that description (see Fiedler, p. 89). The contradiction, I would suggest, is to be found in the women novelists themselves. Sometimes, apparently, setting out with feminist intentions, they create works with anti-feminist implications because of the effects on them of their role of moral respectability or their romantic idealization of womanhood. Conversely, women intending to uphold the traditions of a male-dominated society find that the novel's conventions are not always conducive to this purpose. The peculiarities of the women novelists' position in the eighteenth century means that their works, though they clearly exhibit common tendencies, cannot simply be labelled progressive or conservative, feminist or anti-feminist. They cannot easily be categorized, but a study of them shows, as P.M. Spacks expresses it, "some special relations between women and convention, some special purposes for which women used even the most seemingly empty literary forms, and some special strategies enlisted in the assertion of female identity".² The following chapters refer in greater detail to the work of particular women novelists, in order to analyse some of the special, complex and often contradictory ways in which they use the conventions of the novel and the eighteenth-century convention of ideal womanhood.

¹Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 36.

²Spacks, Imagining a Self, p. 57.

PART TWO: WOMEN NOVELISTS, 1744-1790.

CHAPTER 4

SARAH FIELDING

The works of Sarah Fielding (1710-1768) are particularly animated by the two purposes of defining women's duties, and protesting about injustices done to women. It is not surprising to find these two concerns together. Respectability for a woman writer depended on her teaching moral lessons to her own sex, while at the same time, when entering the literary world she was likely to realize that as a woman she had to contend with unfair disadvantages. These two concerns, which can be loosely termed Sarah Fielding's "feminism" and her "morality", are sometimes in conflict in her novels, suggesting some effects which women writers' admission to respectability had on their literary treatment of women.

Sarah Fielding achieved not merely respectability, but fame. Her connection with the major novelists of the century helped ensure her success. Henry Fielding corrected David Simple (1744) for its second edition and provided a laudatory preface, and he encouraged, advertised, and occasionally contributed to her other works.¹ Richardson printed The Governess (1749), The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia (1757) and The History of the Countess of Dellwyn (1759), subscribed to her works, and encouraged others to subscribe.² Both novelists praised her. In Tom Jones Sophia praises a novel, probably David Simple, as "the Production of a young Lady of Fashion, whose good Understanding, I think, doth Honour to her

¹He contributed the preface and five letters to her Familiar Letters (1747), which he advertised in the True Patriot in 1746. See W.L. Cross, The History of Henry Fielding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), II, 46.

²See W.M. Sale, Samuel Richardson: Master Printer (New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 113-114.

Sex, and whose good Heart is an Honour to Human Nature".¹ The most famous praise of her is Richardson's claim that "a critical judge of writing", usually identified as Johnson, considered her knowledge of the human heart greater than her brother's. "His was but as the knowledge of the outside of a clock-work machine", Richardson wrote to her, "while your's was that of all the finer springs and movements of the inside".²

Sarah Fielding's fame, which was such that the Monthly Review considered it "superfluous to compliment the Author of David Simple upon her Merits as a Writer",³ is important in the history of women's writing because it helped establish the idea of the respectable female novelist. It has been pointed out that "[n]ot until, in 1740, the novel had been raised to respectability by Richardson, and not until respectable women novelists achieved fame -- Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, and Fanny Burney -- were the two respectabilities [of the novel and of the woman writer] joined".⁴ Like Penelope Aubin, Jane Barker, and Elizabeth Rowe before her, Sarah Fielding adopts the persona of the woman writer as "moral censor of the age",⁵ but her more substantial achievements, and the greater measure of recognition she was given, make her particularly influential in establishing this persona for future generations of women novelists.

It is as a moralist that Sarah Fielding is praised by her contemporaries. In his preface to the Familiar Letters, Fielding recommends the work particularly to female readers,

¹Tom Jones ed. Battestin and Bowers, Book 6, Ch. 5, p. 286.

²Richardson to Sarah Fielding, 7 December 1756; in Selected Letters, p. 330.

³Monthly Review 17 (1757), 39.

⁴Halsband, "'The Female Pen'", p. 703.

⁵John J. Richetti on Penelope Aubin, in Popular Fiction Before Richardson, p. 229.

claiming that "no Book extant is so well calculated for their Instruction and Improvement".¹ Her intention, he writes, is to teach women that "the Consummation of a Woman's Character, is to maintain the Qualities of Goodness, Tenderness, Affection and Sincerity, in the several social Offices and Duties of Life; and not to unite Ambition, Avarice, Luxury, and Wantonness in the Person of a Woman of the World, or to affect Folly, Childishness and Levity, under the Appellation of a fine Lady" (Familiar Letters, I, xxi). Certainly this is part of Sarah Fielding's intention in all her works, and this makes her one of the novelists who contribute to the formation of the late eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. Recent critics have laid more emphasis on the fact that she is a champion of women as well as a writer on female conduct. Deborah Downs-Meirs writes of her "well-reasoned, superbly and continually argued commitment to equality for women, in education and in marriage",² while Ann Parrish calls her a "consistent feminist".³ Much of the evidence for these claims is to be found in her first novel.

David Simple (1744), contains Sarah Fielding's most unambiguously feminist statements. She directs her most pointed satire at those who despise or ill-treat women, often italicizing the most offensive of the male attitudes for ironic emphasis. The Jew who wants to marry the elder Miss Johnson finds their difference in religion no objection, for "He was charmed with her Person, and thought Women's Souls were of no great consequence,

¹Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple, I, xx.

²Labyrinths of the Mind, a Study of Sarah Fielding, Phd. thesis Univ. of Missouri, Columbia, 1975; abstract from Dissertation Abstracts International 36 (1976), 4504-A.

³Eight Experiments in Fiction: A critical analysis of the works of Sarah Fielding, unpub. diss Boston Univ., 1973, p. 250.

nor did it signify much what they profess".¹ Nokes, who supplants David as suitor to the younger Miss Johnson, does not worry about gaining her affections, because he "took it for granted, that every virtuous Woman, when she was married, must love her Husband well enough to make a good Wife, and comply with his Humour" (David Simple, p. 34). Here, a moral doctrine inculcated by many contemporary novelists is revealed as an excuse for unfeeling men to treat women badly. The belief that chastity is the only important female virtue is criticized when Nanny Johnson, upset at having lost David, exclaims that she is ruined, and her father, "who had no Idea of a Woman's being ruin'd any way but one", assumes she has been seduced (p. 41). The modest silence expected of an unmarried girl is "a Plot laid by Parents to make their Daughters willing to accept any Match they provide for them, that they may have the Privilege of Speaking" (p. 87). This comment is put into the mouth of Spatter, a character eventually rejected for his heartlessness, but who evidently provides the author with a spokesman for some of her bitterest ideas about human nature.

The first part of David Simple, in which the hero searches London for a true friend and meets with treachery and hypocrisy, is planned as a satire on a wide range of society's vices, but Sarah Fielding finds it more congenial to criticize men than women. Chapter 8 of the first book contains two stories, meant to illustrate that either partner in marriage can torment the other. David meets two married couples. One of the husbands dotes on his lazy, scolding wife, while the other is harsh to his virtuous, submissive wife. The first story is told briefly,

¹The Adventures of David Simple ed. Malcolm Kelsall, p. 33. This edition also contains Volume the Last (1753), the sequel to David Simple.

with the focus mainly on the husband's comic inability to realize that his wife's behaviour is at all unsatisfactory. The second story is told at much greater length, by the unhappy wife herself. After a runaway marriage, she is living in poverty, neglected by the husband whom she still loves. Various details add to the pathos of the story, such as the description of the wife, who "had been very pretty, but her Eyes now had a Deadness in them" (p. 52). David, moved by her story, "could not conceive how it was possible for good Usage to make a Man despise his Wife, instead of returning Gratitude and Good-humour for her Fondness" (pp. 56-7). In the first edition, this comment ended the chapter. For the second edition Henry Fielding added this ironic twist: "He never once reflected on what is perhaps really the Case, that to prevent a Husband's Surfeit or Satiety in the Matrimonial Feast, a little Acid is now and then very prudently thrown into the Dish by the Wife" (p. 57). This addition is cited by R.S. Hunting as an example of Henry Fielding's "sharper irony",¹ but it is out of place here, unbalancing the sentimental tone of the wife's story and obscuring the straightforward indignation expressed against male abuse of authority. The comment Sarah Fielding makes on the doting husband and the idle wife is truer to her view of marriage, and shows that she is capable of sharp ironies of her own:

I think it very likely, if she had known her own Deserts, and been humble in her Behaviour, he would have paid her no other Compliment, than that of confessing her in the right, in the mean Thoughts she had of herself. He then would have been Master in his own House, and have made a Drudge of her (p. 51).

The undutiful wife is the wiser woman.

¹"Fielding's Revisions of David Simple", Boston University Studies in English 3 (1957), 120.

Sarah Fielding also shows feminist ideas in her comic treatment of the proposal of the unworthy suitor. Such a scene was particularly popular with women novelists in the eighteenth century, and is used by Jane Austen in Pride and Prejudice. In David Simple, Cynthia is condescendingly addressed by a country gentleman who tells her "I like your Person, hear you have had a sober Education, think it time to have an Heir to my Estate, and am willing, if you consent to it, to make you my Wife", and proceeds to enumerate the duties he expects his wife to undertake. Cynthia "made him a low Court'sey, and thanked him for the Honour he intended me; but told him, I had no kind of Ambition to be his upper Servant" (p. 109). Comments on the difficulty of a woman's position in courtship are found in Familiar Letters in the story of Isabinda, who wishes:

that it might not be thought a Crime in us to desire some little time for Consideration, before we put ourselves entirely in a Man's power; and that the Gentlemen would be so indulgent, as to allow us the Liberty to make a difference between drinking Tea, or sitting in company every now and then an hour with a Man, and being married to him (Familiar Letters, I, 128).

The protest which is made most often and most passionately in Sarah Fielding's work, however, is against the ridicule and disapproval suffered by women who show intellectual abilities. In David Simple, Cynthia tells the hero how her childhood and youth have been ruined by the reaction to her desire for knowledge:

I loved reading, and had a great Desire of attaining Knowledge; but whenever I asked Questions of any kind whatsoever, I was always told, such Things were not proper for Girls of my Age to know: If I was pleased with any Book above the most silly Story or Romance, it was taken from me. For Miss must not enquire too far into things, it would turn her Brain; she had better mind her Needle-work, and such Things as were useful for Women; reading and poring on Books, would never get me a Husband (David Simple, p. 101).

Home is made miserable by her parents' treatment and her sisters' envy. The common belief that men have stronger minds in stronger bodies is discredited in the story of Cynthia's brother, who is neither healthy nor clever, and who dies at school of a consumption induced by "the continual tormenting and whipping him, to make him learn his Book" (p.112). Cynthia is left out of her father's will and rejected by her sisters, and becomes companion to a great lady, with whom she lives a miserable life. Wit, Cynthia decides, brings a woman no happiness: "I am very certain, the Woman who is possessed of it, unless she can be so peculiarly happy as to live with People void of Envy, had better be without it" (p. 102).

Sarah Fielding's particular sensitivity on this issue is doubtless due to first-hand experience of prejudice against women of learning. One of her letters to Richardson complains of a man who thinks women unfit to correspond with literary men. She and one of the Misses Collier "were at dinner with a hic, haec, hoc man, who said, well, I do wonder Mr. Richardson will be troubled with such silly women".¹ She was a classical scholar herself, and her last published work was a translation of Xenophon's Memoirs of Socrates (1762). Understandably, it was important to her that more credit should be given to women's intelligence, and like many eighteenth-century women, she felt that the respectability of the woman writer depended on her being learned. Like her predecessor, Jane Barker, she "missed no opportunity to advance the cause of feminine education by a display of learning".² Her novels are full of what one reviewer calls "bits and scraps of unnecessary quotations" from classical

¹Sarah Fielding to Richardson, 8 January 1749; in The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, II, 59.

²W.H. McBurney, "Edmund Curll, Mrs. Jane Barker, and the English Novel", PQ 37 (1958), 397.

and modern authors.¹ Séjourné explains that such quotations seemed necessary to women who wanted their writing to be respected: "citer, c'est-à-dire montrer qu'on se rattachait à une tradition culturelle, paraissait indispensable".² Sarah Fielding wanted to show her learning and to prove that women have a right to the education that would raise their writing to literary respectability.

She often attempts this proof through a satirical portrait of a stupid man who despises women's intelligence. A typical example is the gentleman in Familiar Letters who is eager for the women to leave the room after dinner. After their withdrawal he "looked very happy, drank one Bumper of Wine, said 'Now the Women are gone, we may enjoy ourselves;' then fell fast asleep, and never spoke a word afterwards". The more enlightened gentleman who reports this agrees with Cynthia that "the Gentleman was only afraid, he should hear something uttered by Women above his own Understanding" (Familiar Letters, II, 123). When Sarah Fielding gives her reasons why women of learning should be accepted and respected, however, we see that it may be more accurate to call her a supporter of the learned woman than a feminist. Women's learning is rendered respectable by being always linked to strict observance of women's duties. The clever wife is also the obedient wife, and the ideal woman is like Camilla's mother, who, Camilla reports, "was a very good-natured Woman, and shewed her Judgment, in always submitting to my Father" (David Simple p. 134). In contrast, Cynthia's mother, who discourages her daughter from reading, never submits to her husband, for "she was one of those sort of Women, who, if they once take any thing in their Heads,

¹Review of The Countess of Dellwyn, Monthly Review 20 (1759), 381.

²Séjourné, p. 508.

will never be quiet till they have attained it" (p. 107). Female learning and female dominance are thus presented as opposed concepts.

This pattern is consistently found in Sarah Fielding's later work, so that on the question of women's learning, emancipation is sacrificed to respectability. The Cry, for example, argues that women's learning and women's duties go hand-in-hand. Written in collaboration with Jane Collier, The Cry (1754) consists of Portia's vindication of her pious, moral and sentimental attitude to life in front of the Cry, an audience of malicious people from the fashionable world. One subject frequently raised is women's learning. When Portia mentions logic, the Cry "opened all at once full-mouthed against women's understanding logic; . . . all the feminine part of the CRY utterly disclaimed all knowledge of it themselves; . . . they unanimously pronounced that logic was a man's business; and they were certain that a woman would never be married who pretended to such high learning".¹ The point is heavily made that these women themselves have the faults of which they wrongly accuse learned women. They "raised their voices to the highest pitch, and talk'd all together till their breath failed them, in endeavouring to prove that logical women would stun their husbands, and never suffer them to be at rest for their eternal babbling" (The Cry, I, 76-7). The intelligent Portia is in favour of wifely obedience, declaring, "so far am I from thinking the vow of obedience in the matrimonial service a burthen, that it is my utmost pleasure" (II, 33), while the women of the Cry are indifferent to their duties, and "from the time that Portia had mentioned the word OBEDIENCE TO A HUSBAND, an indolent gaping

¹The Cry: A new dramatic fable (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1754), I, 76.

had stretched their mouths, and heavy slumbers weighed down their eye-lids, till they were involved in a general and sound repose" (II, 34).

There are dangers in learning, as the story of Cylinda in The Cry shows. Brought up on the classics without being taught Christianity, she becomes too proud of her own reason, and has illicit love-affairs because of her resolve not to lose her freedom in marriage. Cylinda repents, embraces Christianity, and wishes that she had chosen "a man of true understanding and steady principles, who might kindly have guided my wandering imagination" (II, 157). Cylinda's misguided upbringing is contrasted with Portia's, who is taught to place her faith in revealed religion, not human reason, and whose education is designed to make her "a real agreeable companion as a wife to any man of sense" (II, 161). Cylinda's and Portia's stories illustrate Sarah Fielding's view that learning is only a danger to womanly virtues if religion is neglected. Combined with Christianity, learning makes a woman more, not less, attentive to her duty.

Sarah Fielding's arguments are typical of many eighteenth-century supporters of better education for women. Agreeing that women should not usurp male authority, they nevertheless argue that better education for women will not have any such consequences. The bluestockings lent support to this type of argument by precept and example, and Elizabeth Carter in particular became a symbol of the womanly woman of learning. In The Cry she appears as Miss C--, "uncommonly diligent in every part of useful oeconomy", who finds time for study not by neglecting domestic duties but "by the most assiduous industry" (I, 92). After this praise of Miss C--, Portia adds:

That every Woman ought to be an oeconomist, and to be thoroughly acquainted with all those things which are called female accomplishments, I am so far from contradicting, that I looked on it as too universally allowed to need any mention or justification. And full as distant also am I from thinking, that what is called a learned education is by any means necessary, or even proper for women in general (I, 97).

This view of women's learning is similar to Richardson's, and illustrates how supporters of women's education could almost destroy their own argument in their concern for womanly respectability.

The various protests about injustices to women, which more than balance the argument in favour of a wife's obedience in David Simple, are less prominent in Sarah Fielding's later works. There are some examples of protest. Women's problems in courtship are considered in Familiar Letters, where Isabinda criticizes coxcombs who take anything a woman says or does to be encouragement. "Distant Civility they take for a modest Concealment of a Passion; Rudeness they construe into Love; if by chance you look at them, you are eagerly desirous of engaging their Affection; and if by accident you overlook them, you are timorous lest they should engage yours" (Familiar Letters, I, 72). The History of the Countess of Dellwyn (1759) describes the unfair pressures that are put on Miss Lucum to marry a rich old Lord, and at their wedding she is described as Lord Dellwyn's "destined Prey".¹ Criticism of the treatment of women is less in evidence in the later works, however, apart from the perennial arguments in favour of better education for women.

It may be that Richardson and some of his female friends had an influence on this change. It is not known exactly when Sarah

¹The History of the Countess of Dellwyn (London: A. Millar, 1759), I, 4.

Fielding became acquainted with Richardson,¹ but his influence is seen more in her later works than in her first novel. David Simple, though often called Richardsonian,² was influenced more by Fielding than by Richardson, and Séjourné places it with Eliza Haywood's Fortunate Foundlings and Mary Collyer's Letters from Felicia to Charlotte as 1740s novels which show more influence of women writers of the beginning of the century than of Richardson.³ In her later works Sarah Fielding is greatly influenced by Richardson, especially by the moral sentiments found in Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison. Her defence of the woman of learning in The Cry closely echoes his own. Other women in Richardson's circle adopt a very similar defence. Frances Sheridan, who was acquainted with Sarah Fielding, combines the woman of learning with the dutiful daughter and wife in Sidney Bidulph. Sidney spends more time with her needle than her book, and shows that she does not place too great a value on her learning by calling it an "accidental, and I think (to a woman) trivial accomplishment".⁴ Her life of exemplary virtue proves that the learned and the dutiful woman are to be found in the same person. Sarah Scott, another novelist acquainted with Richardson and with Sarah Fielding, argues that the "man who has the good fortune to be married to a woman of sense and education, has only to make himself beloved and respected by her, and then he is sure of being obeyed with pleasure".⁵ It is perhaps

¹Kelsall places her as a member of Richardson's North End circle in 1744; see his introduction to David Simple p. xxvii. Eaves and Kimpel, however, find no evidence of friendship between her and Richardson before 1747; see Samuel Richardson p. 294.

²See, for example, W.L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 77, and R.B. Johnson, The Women Novelists (London: W. Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1918), p. 5.

³Séjourné, p. 109.

⁴Sidney Bidulph, I, 137.

⁵The History of Sir George Ellison (London: A. Millar, 1766), T. 73.

because of Sarah Fielding's friendship with Richardson and members of his circle that the sharp, angry attacks on male authority in David Simple give way to the carefully respectable defence of the woman of learning in her later work.

The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia (1757) clearly illustrates her concern for respectability for the learned woman rather than emancipation for women, and shows how this concern leads to a particular ideal of womanhood. The learned woman is defended on the grounds of her virtue. The virtuous Octavia arouses Antony's jealousy because "unfortunately for me, I had always the Reputation of having an Understanding uncommon for a Woman",¹ while the wicked Cleopatra manipulates Antony by pretending womanly weakness and ignorance. She persuades him to follow her advice while flattering him with the idea that "his own Wisdom must enable him to judge better than it was possible for a weak Woman to do" (Cleopatra and Octavia, p. 32). Because it shows that Antony is stupid to prefer a woman like Cleopatra, who depends on feminine wiles, to an honest learned woman, Cleopatra and Octavia has been called a "feminist statement".² Because it shows how learning places Octavia at a disadvantage, it has been taken as a cry for emancipation for women:

•
Octavia might have made an able man; she was clearly a stupid woman. And it is this, perhaps, which was really behind Sarah Fielding's mind all the time; she is exhibiting the first flickerings of revolt at the subsidiary place allotted to woman . . .³

These claims tend to overestimate the feminist element of the work. One of Sarah Fielding's points is certainly that Octavia is at a

¹The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia ed. R.B. Johnson (London: Scholartis Press, 1928), p. 167.

²Parrish, p. 155.

³Review of Cleopatra and Octavia ed. R.B. Johnson, in Times Literary Supplement 4 April, 1929. p. 273.

disadvantage because she does not use the feminine wiles which help women to succeed in an unfair society. However, she does not argue that Octavia would have made an "able man" or that she would have benefited if men and women had been considered equals in her society. Far from being a heroine with the abilities of a man, thwarted by a male-dominated society, Octavia is presented as the ideal woman, whose virtues are specifically feminine. Antony is criticized not for failing to recognize women's rights, but for failing to recognize the ideal woman.

The Dedication makes clear the feminine ideal behind the contrast between Cleopatra and Octavia:

Cleopatra presents us with the abandoned Consequences, and the fatal Catastrophe, of an haughty, false, and intriguing Woman; whose only Views were to exert her Charms, and prostitute her Power, to the Gratification of a boundless Vanity and Avarice, without regard to the ruin of her Country, or the Sufferings of others.

The amiable and gentle Octavia gives us, on the reverse, an Example of all those Graces and Embellishments worthy the most refined Female Character. The Dignity she preserved, and the Delicacy of her Manners, became her elevated station . . . She patronized the Learned, and was of truly Roman Spirit, in sacrificing her private to the public Good. . . . She was a sincere Friend, an affectionate Sister, a faithful Wife, and both a tender and instructive Parent (p. xxxix).

Cleopatra is the antithesis of the womanly ideal, cruel, selfish, and power-hungry. Without the virtues proper to women, she is ruled by the principle of female vanity. It is emphasized throughout her story that ambition, and love of her power over men, are her motivating forces, and that she has no love for Antony. She declares, "I had, in plain Truth, no other Value for this great Hero, than as he was the means of my Power, and the Instrument of my Ambition" (p. 18). Octavia on the other hand has never had any ambition but to live a serene life of country retirement. Love is her only passion. She agrees to marry Antony from a sense of public duty, and after the marriage duty

and gratitude for his initial kindness combine to create "an ardent and true Affection" for him (p. 165). Her intelligence is combined with womanly modesty and deference to male authority, and she explains that "as I had never once dreamed of any Superiority over my Husband, his supposing my harbouring such a Thought, was beyond my Comprehension" (p. 167). In contrast to Cleopatra's manipulation, Octavia practises strict obedience to Antony even when he treats her badly. Love, duty, gentleness and submissiveness make up "the accomplished Character of Octavia" (p. xxxix). Her learning is the only characteristic used to argue for women's emancipation, and the feminist implications of this theme are compromised by Sarah Fielding's concern to place female learning on the same side as wifely subordination and feminine self-effacement.

The good wife is Sarah Fielding's favourite expression of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. In The Countess of Dellwyn Lady Dellwyn, ruined by her vanity, is compared with Mrs. Bilson, an ideally virtuous wife. Unlike Lady Dellwyn, who spends her time at public places, Mrs. Bilson is a domestic woman who believes that "a Wife's Scene of Action ought to be in her own House" (Countess of Dellwyn, I, 163). When her husband becomes indifferent she forbears to reproach, and continues to show him affection. His extravagance ruins them, and when he is imprisoned for debt she goes with him and sells fancy-work to raise money for him. She adopts his illegitimate child as one of her own. Mrs. Bilson is very reminiscent of Henry Fielding's Amelia, and like Amelia she is rewarded by her husband's affection: "he was overwhelmed with all her Goodness; and the Fondness which Variety had suppressed, was rekindled with double Ardour; I might, not improperly, say, was arisen almost to a Degree of Adoration" (I, 182).

Sarah Fielding's ideal of womanhood is representative of a widespread tendency among eighteenth-century moralists to exalt women's virtues and glorify their subordinate position, but in many ways it is a different ideal from that presented by later sentimental writers. Beautiful young girls and obedient long-suffering wives are both frequently idealized in eighteenth-century fiction. The two types are by no means incompatible, but many writers prefer one to the other. Sarah Fielding emphatically prefers the wife, and it is significant that adoration, not usually offered to Sarah Fielding's heroines, is paid to the dutiful Mrs. Bilson, not to a young unmarried girl. Young unmarried heroines do appear in Sarah Fielding's novels, and the differences between them and later sentimental heroines are partly explicable in terms of the development of more delicate sensibilities in the 1760s and 1770s, after she had finished writing. The heroine of The History of Ophelia (1760), her last novel, is closest to the typical heroine of the Richardsonian imitation. She is brought up in innocence and seclusion, and abducted by a rake who hopes eventually to persuade her to become his mistress. Her virtue overcomes his evil designs and they marry. Ophelia is presented as the personification of innocence and simplicity, but her sensibility is by no means so refined as the sensibilities of Frances Brooke's or Elizabeth Griffith's heroines. Certain farcical incidents, more reminiscent of Fielding than a sentimental novel, amuse her. For instance, one night at an inn her sleep is disturbed by Mrs. Herner's cries of rape. The accused man claims, "the Jade was willing enough to come to Bed to me before I asked her",¹ and abandons Mrs. Herner in disgust as soon as he sees her face

¹The History of Ophelia (London: R. Baldwin, 1760), II, 7-8.

properly. Ophelia provides a grotesque description of Mrs. Herner and comments that she herself "could not restrain a Smile" at this incident (Ophelia, II, 9).

Another difference between Sarah Fielding's and later sentimental writers' ideals of womanhood is due to Sarah Fielding's anti-romantic attitude. As a moralist she opposes the great power attributed to love in the sentimental plot. There is evidence that she is dissatisfied with the happy ending she gives to Ophelia's romance. Ophelia, describing how her aunt persuaded her to marry Lord Dorchester after his repentance, comments, "[h]er Opinion gave a Sanction for my yielding; I could call my Weakness obedient; an Opportunity of so agreeably deceiving myself, staggered my Resolution" (II, 279). The marriage is happy, but the heroine feels it ought not to be: "mine was a dangerous Trial, and, I think, my Imprudence in making it, deserved a Punishment rather than a Reward" (II, 282-3). The Cry offers further evidence of an anti-romantic attitude. Like Charlotte Lennox in The Female Quixote, she shows herself an enemy to the heightened pictures of romantic adoration found in French romances. Portia criticizes romances for their false pictures of love:

The application of the word romantic, as we now generally use it, took its rise from the great love young girls formerly had to reading those voluminous romances, in which the heroine is represented as thinking it the highest breach of modesty to give the least hint of having one favourable sentiment for her lover, till he hath passed many years of probation, and given innumerable proofs of being capable of adoring his mistress even to madness (The Cry, I, 37).

Sarah Fielding's objections to the romances are in some respects feminist ones. Portia argues that the apparent superiority conferred on women in courtship is an illusion intended to persuade them into a state of submission and dependence. The

addresses of an adoring lover, she says, should be translated into this statement:

"Madam, I like you (no matter whether from fortune, person, or any other motive) and it will conduce much to my pleasure and convenience, if you will become my wife: that is, if you will bind yourself before God and man to obey my commands as long as I shall live. And should you after marriage be forgetful of your duty, you will then have given me a legal power of exacting as rigid a performance of it as I please" (I, 44).

This makes a good feminist exposé of the real male dominance hidden by romantic adoration of women, but Portia goes on to draw a moral which is hardly consistent with a feminist argument. The deception involved in courtship is blamed on women more than on men, and the woman who listens to false adoration is described as "the poor woman, who hath been thus egregiously imposed on (or rather who hath so egregiously imposed on herself)" (I, 44). The wife who marries after a deceptively romantic courtship is sour and morose because her vanity has been disappointed. The fault is her own. However good a husband she has, she will not be satisfied. "No indulgence on his side . . . can compensate the loss of adoration. She will not confess, even to herself, her own inferiority, enough to understand the language of indulgence" (I, 45). It is not the husband's dominant position in marriage which Sarah Fielding objects to, but its concealment under the flattering conventions of courtship. Rather than believe the language of romantic adoration, a woman should, as Portia remarks later, "chuse the man she can obey with pleasure" (II, 33).

Portia's analysis of the causes of women's romantic expectations is a feminist one. She describes women's education in passivity and vanity, which begins at an early stage. "Little miss is taught by her mamma,

that she must never speak before she is spoken to. On this she sits bridling up her head, looking from one to the other, in hopes of being call'd to and address'd by the name of pretty miss" (I, 39). Such education has its fruits when "the bigger miss" acts in just the same way at a ball, "expecting every moment to be chosen by some man for a partner for that evening" (I, 39). Women's enforced role of passivity makes the fear of being neglected a predominant passion, and leads to insincerity and lack of self-respect. "The same expectation of being chosen out as a partner for life continues . . . and if no such partner offers, full as many excuses are found out to cover over the dreadful appearance of being neglected as miss made use of at the ball" (I, 41). Moral lesson and feminist argument are combined when Sarah Fielding summarizes her objection to heightened ideas of romantic love. "Women by thus insisting on it, that they will be persuaded to love, lead their whole lives in expectation, which makes them continually liable to the vexation of a disappointment" (I, 39).

Sarah Fielding's analyses of women's place in society are usually motivated by her desire as a moralist to denounce vanity or to preach reason and resignation to women. In Familiar Letters, there is an interesting description of a group of people on a boat, frightened by a storm:

the Ladies were . . . affecting more Fear than in reality they felt, to prove their Tittle [sic] to that Timorousness and Softness, which are esteemed so amiable in their Sex; and the Gentlemen were equally as much affected in their pretended Unconcern, to shew they were possessed of that Courage so necessary to recommend them (Familiar Letters, II, 65).

Sarah Fielding is strongly feminist as she exposes the stereotypes

of men's courage and women's timidity as false ideas which have a tyrannic effect on the behaviour of both sexes. As her next sentence shows, however, she is equally interested in criticizing that behaviour on moral grounds, as vanity and frivolity: "thus in the Danger of immediate Death, they could not help thinking of making themselves reciprocally Objects of Admiration" (II, 65). In this case, Sarah Fielding's didactic concern and her feminism reinforce one another, showing how bold criticism of society can be made from the socially-sanctioned position of the woman writer as moralist.

At times, however, Sarah Fielding's concern with morality compromises her feminism. For example, the plight of Miss Weare, a minor character in The Countess of Dellwyn, is illustrative of injustice to women, but is used to point a moral about the necessity of resignation. An impoverished orphan, Miss Weare chooses to try to attract a husband rather than to go into service, but this stratagem does not work. Men believe her to be a kept woman, and make dishonourable propositions. The author has little sympathy for her, commenting, "Her Conduct could not recommend her to a worthy Man; and, if any other liked her, they hoped to obtain her on easier Terms: Therefore she was never thought on in the Light of A Wife" (Countess of Dellwyn, II, 220). Miss Weare agrees to become the companion of Lady Dellwyn, now disgraced, and her association with an adultress does nothing to improve her reputation. The author points out that many innocent women are condemned by gossip: "the Reputations of more Women have suffered by keeping Company with the infamous Part of their own Sex, than from any real Guilt or Imprudence with the other" (II, 220). Instead of condemning this unfairness, she sees loss of reputation as a fitting punishment for Miss Weare, who "chose rather the Venture

of blasting her Character, than the more disagreeable Alternative of relinquishing her Rank" (II, 220-221).

The Countess of Dellwyn as a whole exhibits Sarah Fielding's tendency to apply very strict moral standards to women's behaviour. On summary the plot illustrates a feminist argument. Unfairly tricked into marriage with old Lord Dellwyn, Lady Dellwyn tries at first to be a dutiful wife and to conceal her distaste for her husband. Gradually corrupted by the fashionable society she moves in, Lady Dellwyn eventually has an affair with Clermont, a practised seducer, is discovered, and cast off by her husband, her father and her acquaintances. Lord Dellwyn is an unsympathetic character whose "Hopes of purchasing the Affections of a young Beauty by his Pomp and Title" are justly disappointed (I, 149). Lady Dellwyn's father has ambitious designs in wanting his daughter to marry a member of the aristocracy who might patronize him. On her initial refusal of the match, he threatens to turn her out, "being perfectly convinced that if his Daughter would not be a Countess, it was very reasonable that she should be abandoned to any Misfortunes or Miseries whatsoever" (I, 31). Although partly responsible for her unhappy position, he treats her very harshly when her husband rejects her. These men are criticized for their abuse of power, and the fashionable world for its pressures on Lady Dellwyn to succumb to flattery.

The purpose of the tale, however, is less a critique of women's position in marriage than a moral lesson about female vanity. It is when her vanity is piqued by the possibility of Lord Dellwyn's preferring another that Miss Lucum agrees to marry him. She thinks so little of matrimonial duties that "when she answered I will, she never imagined that she had promised more than that she would thenceforward follow implicitly wheresoever

Vanity should lead" (I, 78). Vanity, not love, drives her to the affair with Clermont, and it is vanity which leads to her attempt to re-enter fashionable society in Paris rather than submit to a life of retirement in England. The moral of Lady Dellwyn's story is that "[t]hose who have affirmed that Love will conquer all things, should have considered that there is no Rule without an Exception; for Vanity is not to be so baffled, and still claims the Honour of being unconquerable" (II, 235).

This moral scheme means that heavy blame is laid on Lady Dellwyn, and any conclusions about the difficulty of her position as a woman are avoided. The author carefully denies any suggestion that adulteries can even partly be blamed on parents who force unhappy marriages on their daughters. Clermont, we are told, only attempts to seduce those women who are in a sense already condemned, having "sacrificed willingly their Youth and Beauty to the Gratification of Vanity and Ambition". Innocent victims of parental authority remain virtuous. "To those young Women, who, in marrying for interested Considerations, had Regard only to the obeying of Parents and Guardians, Lord Clermont seldom made any Addresses; apprehending that they might be actuated by Principles which could not possibly incline them to satisfy his Inclinations" (II, 40). Lord Dellwyn refuses to forgive his wife, partly because she has formerly treated him with contempt, and a moral about a wife's duty is drawn:

Lady Dellwyn was a memorable Instance of the great Imprudence a Woman is guilty of, when she fails in due Respect to her Husband. If he deserves such a Treatment, the Contempt justly returns redoubled on her own Head for consenting to be the Wife of a Man she despises. In this Sense the Folly of the Husband reflects as much Dishonour on the Wife, as her erroneous Conduct can possibly do on him; with this additional Aggravation, that the Scorn which falls on her on that Account is always deservedly (II, 161-2).

When Lady Dellwyn retires to the country after her divorce, a man who presumes that a woman who has taken one lover will always take another proposes that she becomes his mistress. Lady Dellwyn rejects the offer indignantly, but the author comments:

No Man, I believe, is so insensible or void of Humanity, as not to be shocked when he finds he hath given Offence to a Woman truly virtuous, by presuming on her Distress of Circumstances; but when one of known Frailty assumes the Language of Virtue, it only renders her more despised (II, 211).

Here Sarah Fielding's moral condemnation of Lady Dellwyn leads her to acquiesce in the view that after one lapse a woman is fair game for any man. Despite the mitigating circumstances of her marriage, which encourage some virtuous women to pity Lady Dellwyn, the overwhelming conclusion of the book is that her misfortunes are her own fault, and this is generalized in the didactic heading of Book 4, Chapter 2, to the proposition: "Bonds of our own Choice and Making, the most effectual towards reducing us to the most abject Slavery" (II, 150).

Sarah Fielding is able to conclude that women's bonds are of their "own Choice and Making" because of the optimistic, even facile, morality which the novel upholds. A wife's misfortunes must be her own fault in a world constructed to illustrate "the natural Tendency of Virtue towards the Attainment of Happiness; and, on the contrary, that Misery is the unavoidable Consequence of vicious Life" (Preface, I, iv). A more complex vision is to be found in Volume the Last (1753) of David Simple, which Kelsall, rightly in my opinion, calls her best work.¹ The happy and virtuous society composed of David and Camilla, Cynthia and Valentine, and their children, is slowly and inexorably destroyed by a malign world. Lawsuits reduce their fortune to the point

¹Introduction to David Simple, p. xi.

where Valentine and Cynthia have to go to Jamaica in an attempt to support themselves. The malicious Orgueils offer what appears to be assistance, and David and Camilla are too virtuous to suspect their motives and too timid to refuse. Virtue is consistently punished. For example, Cynthia's child dies because she is sent to Bath with Mrs. Orgueil for the sake of her health. Camilla, judging from her own goodness of heart, is convinced that Mrs. Orgueil will be kind to a sick child, and persuades the more suspicious Cynthia to let her child go. Camilla's judgment is entirely mistaken. Mrs. Orgueil sends the child to sleep in a damp bed and death is the result. Valentine, Camilla, and all the children but one eventually die. David, on his deathbed, reflects that love and friendship bring with them the most poignant miseries, and the author concludes that a truly virtuous man like David Simple is better off out of this world so that "neither the Malice of his pretended Friends, nor the Sufferings of his real ones, can ever again rend and torment his honest Heart" (David Simple, p. 432).

It is appropriate that it is Cynthia, the outspoken feminist of David Simple, who is left alive with David and Camilla's remaining daughter. Cynthia is perhaps the most interesting of Sarah Fielding's characters. She voices the most passionate of Sarah Fielding's protests about the position of women, and is herself lively, self-assertive and worldly-wise. She answers David's naive questions with authority. Later in the book, when the four friends are together, Cynthia retains a dominant position, usually leading the conversation and offering explanations of anything the others do not understand. Her view of human nature is bitter. Unlike David she is not surprised at examples of human depravity, and she has noticed that "in all the Families I have ever been acquainted with . . . one part of them spend their

whole time in oppressing and teasing the other" (p. 117). Her wit occasionally leads her into errors, such as the "foolish Ridicule, for which I now condemn myself" which she inflicts on her stupid suitor (p. 109). Cynthia is certainly one of the virtuous, and David proposes to her at one point, but this is before he meets Camilla. Because of her greater gentleness and helplessness Camilla touches his heart in a way Cynthia cannot do.

If Cynthia's character has some flaws which prevent her from sharing David and Camilla's almost saintly innocence, these flaws are also the mark of her competence. When a man makes indecent advances to her in a stage-coach, "she knew enough of the World to repulse such Impertinence, without any great difficulty; and, by her Behaviour, made that Spark very civil to her, the remainder of the Time she was obliged to be with him" (p. 176). Such worldly wisdom is badly needed in Volume the Last, and Cynthia returns from Jamaica as a saviour, in time to comfort David in his last moments and to find financial support for young Camilla. Cynthia is not the submissive woman who is presented elsewhere as Sarah Fielding's ideal, but in the dark world of Volume the Last, where the good die young, an imperfect character is necessary for survival. Though Volume the Last has fewer feminist arguments than David Simple, its analysis of the dangers of sentimental goodness has far-reaching implications as a critique of the developing sentimental ideal of womanhood.

In Sarah Fielding's work as a whole, we see the woman novelist paying for her new status as a respectable writer and moral guide by relinquishing some of her more outspoken feminist arguments. In many ways Sarah Fielding is typical of the mid-century woman novelist. She belongs with a group of respectable women writers around Richardson. Frances Sheridan, Charlotte Lennox and

Sarah Scott were all friends of Richardson, all supporters of women's learning, and all moralists. Sarah Fielding knew Frances Sheridan and Sarah Scott. She was also acquainted with Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, and shared their interest in establishing greater respectability for learned women. Like these women, Sarah Fielding is aware of the problems women face in society, and also like them, she sees the solution in terms of a strict code of morality rather than in any change in the status quo. It is only in Volume the Last, in which the implications of her moral ideal are most deeply explored and in which she concludes that virtue is definitely not rewarded, that this solution is revealed as inadequate.

CHAPTER 5

FRANCES BROOKE AND ELIZABETH GRIFFITH

Frances Brooke (1723-89) and Elizabeth Griffith (1727-93) have a great deal in common as novelists. They produced their novels in the same decades. Frances Brooke's novels The History of Lady Julia Mandeville (1763), The History of Emily Montague (1769), and The Excursion (1777), span a greater period than Elizabeth Griffith's The Delicate Distress (1769), The History of Lady Barton (1771), and The Story of Lady Juliana Harley (1773). Both writers, however, share the tendency of the 1760s and 1770s towards an increase in sensibility in literature, and their works can be contrasted with the earlier works of Sarah Fielding. Sarah Fielding's works are sentimental in an early definition of the word, that is, concerned with expressing moral sentiments. In the novels of Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith, moral concerns are still important, but sentiments are more delicate and refined, and emotions are heightened.¹ They represent the beginnings of the "full-fledged novel of sensibility" which "was to out-sentimentalize Richardson".² We may add that it was also to do much to establish the common equation of women's writing with sentimental writing.

¹See the discussion of uses of the word 'sentimental' in 1746-59, in Erik Erämetsä, A Study of the Word 'Sentimental' and of other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth-Century Sentimentalism in England (Helsinki: Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae B 74, (1), 1951), pp. 21-32. Erämetsä points out that "Richardson and Johnson used 'sentiment' in the same sense: to denote 'moral reflection', 'moralizing'" (p. 29). Sarah Fielding's work is very 'sentimental' in this sense. Erämetsä discusses the development of emotional connotations to the word 'sentimental' in 1760-7 (pp.32-9), and considers the definition "characterized by refined and elevated feeling" to be "typical of the seventeen-sixties" (p. 39). Brooke's and Griffith's novels are 'sentimental' in this sense.

²E.A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. V, The Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance (London, 1932; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950), p. 96.

Brooke and Griffith share similar forms and themes. With the exception of The Excursion, a third-person narrative, all their novels are in the epistolary form, which is particularly suited to analyses of character and emotion, and to the presentation of various opinions and attitudes to life. Both writers concentrate on the theme of love, considered particularly suitable for women novelists. Often two or three love-stories are developed in the main plot, affording opportunities for displaying various attitudes to love and highlighting the fervent devotion of hero and heroine. Digressions, usually involving a minor character's narration of an unhappy love-affair, are used to illustrate the main theme.

The two writers are also similar in style, both seeking to achieve the elegance and delicacy considered peculiarly feminine. In Frances Brooke's case this style is partly based on that of the French writer Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, whose Lettres de Juliet Catesby she translated in 1760. Elizabeth Griffith also, "[1]ike Mme. Riccoboni and Mrs. Brooke . . . strove to make her style elegant and graceful".¹ The theme, the morality, the sentimentalism and the style of their novels received contemporary approval. A writer in the Gentleman's Magazine contended that "whilst delicacy of sentiment, and purity of morals are esteemed, the Author of Julia Mandeville, and of Emily Montague, commands our commendation".² Elizabeth Griffith was praised by the Critical Review for her "elegance of style, chasteness of sentiment, and moral tendency".³ Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith, it is clear, intended to be, and were praised for being, typically "feminine" sentimental women novelists.

¹Foster, The Pre-Romantic Novel, p. 152.

²Gentleman's Magazine 41 (1771), 602.

³Review of Lady Juliana Harley, in Critical Review 42 (1776), 155.

Brooke and Griffith are remarkably similar in the attitudes they express as well as in their themes and style. Their characters' discussions centre on the same topics of women's nature and role, the problems of female education, and of courtship and marriage. Both make it clear that their sympathies lie with those characters who advocate women's right to learning, to a choice of marriage partner, and in general to be treated with respect. Their attitudes to women are expressed in the following passage from Griffith's Lady Juliana Harley. William Stanley, the hero's friend and correspondent, has just married the hero's sister, Lucy Evelyn. Full of praise for women in general and Lucy in particular, he gives the hero an explanation of his views.

Did you imagine that I should ever become such a champion for the ladies? "But what can't a charming woman do?" The discovery of your sister's uncommon merits, which were concealed by modesty alone, have rendered me such an enthusiast with regard to women, that I cannot address a chamber-maid without some degree of respect (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 10-11).

The praise of women's merits, and the sense that all women are worthy of respect, pervades all the novels of Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith, together with an ethos which bases this respect on women's charms. It is the attraction of the woman he loves that renders a man in one of these novels an admirer of all women. Brooke and Griffith are both enthusiastic popularizers of the sentimental idealization of womanhood. They are also exponents of women's rights. Their novels display their deliberate, but often uneasy combination of eighteenth-century sensibility with eighteenth-century feminism.

Their version of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood is found in their sentimental heroines. Séjourné writes that they are the novelists who develop the sentimental heroine most

fully. "Peu à peu, les caractéristiques de l'héroïne se précisent; elle existe chez Sarah Fielding et chez Frances Sheridan; elle trouve sa perfection dans l'oeuvre de Frances Brooke et dans celle d'Elizabeth Griffith".¹ The sentimental heroine can be seen in her perfection in Frances Brooke's *Julia Mandeville*, here described by the hero of the novel, Henry Mandeville:

Lady Julia . . . is exactly what a poet or painter would wish to copy, who intended to personify the idea of female softness. Her whole form is delicate and feminine to the utmost degree: her complexion is fair, enlivened by the bloom of youth, and often diversified by blushes more beautiful than those of the morning: her features are regular; her mouth and teeth particularly lovely; her hair light brown; her eyes blue, full of softness, and strongly expressive of the exquisite sensibility of her soul. (*Lady Julia Mandeville*, p. 42).

Julia's beauty is important as an expression of her character. Her delicate figure corresponds to her delicate mind. Her blushes express her sensitivity. Her eyes are beautiful because of their softness and expressiveness. Julia's appearance promises delicacy and sensibility, qualities which are essential parts of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood.

The sentimental heroine's character influences the development of her love story. Julia's sensibility causes her love for Henry. Her delicacy causes the initial misunderstanding between them when Henry believes she does not return his love, and has more serious consequences when it prevents her from telling her parents about her feelings for Henry. The plot of *Lady Julia Mandeville*, a typical sentimental one, concerns misunderstandings caused by fine feelings. Henry, though a member of the same

¹Séjourné, p. 437.

family as Julia, believes himself unworthy of her because he is poor and she is the daughter of rich Lord Belmont. In fact, unknown to Henry, he is the rightful heir to part of Belmont's estate, and his father and Lord Belmont have already planned that he and Julia should marry. Because of reticence and delicacy on the part of the lovers and their parents, the truth is not revealed until too late. Henry, mad with jealousy of Lord Melvin, who he believes to be about to marry Julia, challenges Melvin to a duel, and is mortally wounded. The female softness described as Lady Julia's distinguishing characteristic is translated into an essentially passive role in the plot. She feels intensely, but does not act. She exists only to love Henry and to be loved by him, and his death is quickly followed by her own, caused by no physical illness but entirely by her sensibility.

Other sentimental heroines may have happier stories but their roles are similar. They feel, but rarely act. One of their most important attributes is sensibility. Beauty is important only in order to express sensibility. As one of Brooke's heroes, Edward Rivers, remarks, "without feminine softness and delicate sensibility, no features can give loveliness; with them, very indifferent ones can charm" (Emily Montague, I, 196). Sensibility implies timidity, even a certain degree of melancholy, and is often opposed to vivacity. Various female characters are praised for their timidity. Griffith's Lady Barton describes with approval "a little mixture of timidity in Lucy's eyes, which abated their vivacity, but encreased that charming look of sensibility which is the natural result of refined tenderness" (Lady Barton, II, 293). In Lady Juliana Harley Charles Evelyn points out that sensibility is more attractive in a woman than vivacity, writing of his sister Emma,

"I should think that nothing could be more interesting than her sprightly glance, if I had not seen her downcast eye" (Lady Juliana Harley, I, 10). Later, he makes a categorical definition of female attractiveness. "Tenderness stands second in the catalogue of female charms: modesty is its only antecedent, and always its companion; they are both derived from the same source, from sensibility" (II, 238). Sensibility is the main attraction of Brooke's and Griffith's female characters, and is particularly exemplified by their sentimental heroines.

In these novels, sensibility is important as the basis of women's attractiveness to men. However, virtue is as important as attractiveness to Brooke's and Griffith's ideal of womanhood. The sentimental heroine must be virtuous. Sensibility, however, is often shown in sentimental novels to represent a threat to chastity, that cardinal virtue for the eighteenth-century woman. Sensibility means that women are likely to fall in love, and this, as Edward Rivers points out, can lead to their downfall. "Virtuous less from reasoning and fixed principle, than from elegance, and a lovely delicacy of mind; naturally tender, even to excess; carried away by a romance of sentiment; the helpless sex are too easily seduced", he writes (Emily Montague, IV, 117). The context for Edward's remark is a story told by a minor character, Miss Williams, of a young woman who was seduced by her lover, had an illegitimate baby, and died. Similar tales of seduction are frequently found in Brooke's and Griffith's work, and illustrate, as Charles Evelyn points out, that "it is impossible for a woman to deny any thing to the solicitations of the man she loves" (Lady Juliana Harley, I, 92). If this is the case, we may wonder why the sentimental heroines, whose sensibilities are so much keener than the sensibilities of other characters in the novels, are never in danger of losing their

chastity. One reason might be that they are always loved by sentimental heroes who would never dream of attempting to seduce them. There is a more important reason, however, which is more consistent with the dignity of ideal womanhood.

In the ideal sentimental heroine as portrayed by these two writers, sensibility operates in a special way. Emily Montague's sensibility is a good example of this. Edward Rivers writes that she has "a soul awake to all the finer sensations of the heart, checked and adorned by the native loveliness of woman" (Emily Montague, I, 196). This is an interesting description, implying that Emily's sensations need to be restrained, but that this restraint is not external. The "native loveliness of woman" that checks Emily's sensibility is natural to herself, and also representative of a natural quality in womanhood. We learn more of Emily's sensibility when she imagines what would have happened if instead of being merely engaged to another man when she met Edward Rivers, she had already been actually married. She writes to Edward:

My heart burns with the love of virtue, I am tremblingly alive to fame: what bitterness then must have been my portion had I first seen you when the wife of another!

Such is the powerful sympathy that unites us, that I fear, that virtue, that strong sense of honor and fame, so powerful in minds most turned to tenderness, would only have served to make more poignant the pangs of hopeless, despairing love (IV, 5).

Emily's passions are all directed towards the good. Amorous terms are used for virtue itself, so that when Emily's "heart burns" it is not with sexual desire but with pure love of virtue. She is "tremblingly alive" not to passion but to "fame", that is, her reputation for virtuous conduct. In fact, what "checks" Emily's sensibility is that sensibility itself. Her natural impulses follow in the direction of strict morality. and

"sensibility" has been made synonymous with "virtue". The implication of Brooke's portrayal of Emily Montague is that though many women err because of their sensibility, ideal womanhood includes sensibility and virtue together. The sentimental heroine is not a typical woman, but has the essential qualities of womanhood in their purest form.

Brooke and Griffith both use this image of ideal womanhood to uphold women's dignity and to demonstrate the possibilities of their moral influence on mankind. They show virtuous women managing to exert a good influence on men in various situations. In The Delicate Distress, for example, Elizabeth Griffith places her heroine in the difficult position of a wife who suspects her husband of infidelity. Lady Emily Woodville discovers that her husband is captivated by a marchioness, a former love who wants him back. Emily's sister Fanny advises her not to blame her husband for this but to admire him for keeping his feelings to himself. Emily follows this advice and says nothing to reproach her husband. The proofs of virtue and love which Emily continually gives are soon sufficient to recall Woodville to a sense of his duty. On one occasion he notes that "the unaffected joy [Emily] shewed, at my return, without seeming to be alarmed, at my absence, when contrasted with the violence of temper, which the marchioness had discovered, in the morning, so far turned the scale, as to determine me to remain a slave to the obligations I owe to my wife, and the world".¹ It takes longer for his love for his wife to return, but eventually her loving care and the marchioness's duplicity bring about a change of heart. The two women, one virtuous and one immoral, inconstant and selfish, are

¹The Delicate Distress, Vols. I and II of Two Novels in Letters by the Authors of Henry and Frances [Elizabeth and Richard Griffith] (London: T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1769), II, 34.

contrasted throughout the novel, but it is the virtuous woman who is presented as the type of true womanhood. Contemplating his wife's heroic behaviour, Woodville remarks, "I begin to fear that women are our superiors, in every thing" (The Delicate Distress, II, 140). The message of The Delicate Distress is typical of the work of both Griffith and Brooke. The sentimental heroine proves, by her virtue, the general moral superiority of women over men.

Moral superiority, however, is often granted to women by eighteenth-century writers who explicitly deny them the right to social equality. Female conduct books often use the idea of women's moral superiority to justify their imposition of much stricter moral standards on women than on men. Women's virtue is thus used to keep them in a subordinate position. The Delicate Distress has some flavour of the conduct book, and Emily's uncomplaining acceptance of her husband's behaviour is the reaction the conduct books recommend to wronged wives. In general, however, both Elizabeth Griffith and Frances Brooke show a much more critical view of women's position in society than that of the conduct books, and their novels contain many arguments in favour of emancipation for women. The intelligence always attributed to the sentimental heroine supports arguments for better education for women. Her acute sensibilities demonstrate the need for her to be able to marry for love and not to be married off to suit family convenience. Her virtue and good sense combined make it unnecessary that her husband should have authority over her, as she can always be trusted to act rightly of her own accord. Her many perfections, then, add weight to arguments in favour of improving the position of women in society.

One subject which arouses all the novelists' fervour is the

question of women's choice of a marriage partner. Though some eighteenth-century women novelists praise heroines who marry in order to fulfil their parents' wishes, both Brooke and Griffith are strongly opposed to parental interference in a daughter's marriage. Arabella Fermor in Emily Montague expresses their views when she writes that:

Parents should chuse our company, but never even pretend to direct our choice; if they take care we converse with men of honor only, tis impossible we can chuse amiss: a conformity of taste and sentiment alone can make marriage happy, and of that none but the parties concerned can judge (II, 34-5).

Arabella's view is borne out by the happiness in marriage of the hero and heroine of the novel, who choose each other because of their close similarity of sentiment.

The argument is also illustrated by more unhappy examples in the novelists' work. Both are interested in the unfortunate situation of "a married woman, of sensibility and honor, who dislikes her husband" (Emily Montague, III, 29). The heroine of Elizabeth Griffith's Lady Juliana Harley is a woman who has known this situation. She narrates her history to her correspondent. She was ordered by her father to marry Harley, a man without any share of her own delicate sensibility, although she was in love with the more sensitive Henry Evelyn. When Lady Juliana agreed to obey her father and marry Harley, Evelyn fell into a slow decline. The love between Henry Evelyn and Lady Juliana, though innocent, led to tragedy. Harley, suspecting his wife of adultery, challenged Evelyn, and was killed in their duel. Evelyn's remorse contributed to his own death soon afterwards. The main story of the novel concerns the hopeless love of Charles, Henry Evelyn's younger brother, for the widow. Lady Juliana feels that she cannot have anything to do with Henry after causing his brother's death, and she retires to a convent. The

message of Lady Juliana Harley seems to be that tragedy must follow the original crime of forcing Juliana to marry against her will.

The letters in the novel are full of complaints about the position of women in marriage. William Stanley points out that, while a man who does not love his wife is able to neglect or ill-treat her,

the poor girl, who has been led an unwilling victim to Hymen's altar, can have no safe resource but sighs and tears, no indulgence is allowed to any former, or future passion, she may feel; her affections must be restrained by the magical ceremony of marriage within her own bosom, because she cannot confer them on a wretch she detests, and must not dare to bestow them elsewhere (Lady Juliana Harley, I, 101).

This passage contains radical criticism of eighteenth-century marriage customs, but depends for its impact on a simplified and idealized view of womanhood. The wife is an innocent victim, her husband a wretch. The feminist message of the novel as a whole relies on the idealization of the heroine. Lady Juliana, like the unwilling wife of Stanley's argument, will take only sighs and tears as consolation. It is important that Lady Juliana is a woman "of sensibility and honour". It is because she is a woman of sensibility that it is wrong to force her to marry. Sensibility means that if she is unable to love her husband, she is likely to fall in love with someone else. It is because she is a woman of honour that this love does not lead to adultery, and therefore sympathy for her can be maintained throughout. The ideal heroine's virtue is necessary as a support for the author's feminist claims.

Lady Juliana Harley demonstrates Elizabeth Griffith's interest in other feminist questions. Griffith's belief in women's intelligence is shown in many of the letters written to Richard Griffith during their courtship. She tells him, "I

affirm that Souls are not of different Genders: Therefore, in the metaphysical Nature of the Question, your Sex has, originally, no Advantage over our's".¹ Differences in male and female intellect are due to differences in education and upbringing, and "it is as unfair to censure us for the Weakness of our Understandings, as it would be to blame the Chinese Women for little Feet; for neither is owing to the Imperfection of Nature, but to the Constraint of Custom".² In Lady Juliana Harley there is a discussion of female intelligence between Charles Evelyn and William Stanley, in which Stanley maintains, in accordance with Elizabeth Griffith's opinions, that "[t]here is no sex in souls" (II, 46), and that "education . . . makes all the difference between what is styled a masculine and feminine understanding" (II, 48). Evelyn agrees that "we must give up our boasted superiority, and admit of an intellectual equality between the sons and daughters of Adam" (II, 67).

Frances Brooke also argues that women are equal in intellect to men. In her second novel, William Fermor, a wise man of the world and the mouthpiece for Brooke's political reflections, writes that "[w]omen who have conversed much with men are undoubtedly in general the most pleasing companions; but this only shews of what they are capable when properly educated, since they improve so greatly by that accidental and limited opportunity of acquiring knowledge" (Emily Montague, III, 44). His daughter Arabella also argues that men and women should receive similar educations, writing that it is "a mighty wrong thing . . . that parents will educate creatures so differently, who are to live with and for each other" (II, 178-9). Emily Montague also

¹A Series of Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances, I, 59.

²A Series of Genuine Letters, I, 62.

contains arguments on many other feminist questions. Its hero, Edward Rivers, is in favour of equality between the sexes. When his sister Lucy is about to marry, he tells her not to take any notice of the prevailing opinion that a wife's role is to suffer and obey. On the contrary, "whatever conveys the idea of subjection necessarily destroys that of love, of which I am so convinced, that I have always wished the word OBEY expunged from the marriage ceremony" (II, 195). In describing Canadian customs to Lucy, he approves of the Huron Indians' custom of having the married women of the tribe choose its chief. "The sex we have so unjustly excluded from power in Europe have a great share in the Huron government", he reports (I, 67-8).

The various arguments for equality between the sexes, in education, in marriage, and in political representation, found in the novels of Brooke and Griffith, have one thing in common: none of them are put forward by the sentimental heroine. In Lady Juliana Harley the long discussion of women's intelligence is carried on between two men. In Emily Montague the hero is the most ardent feminist, and feminist arguments are also put forward by Arabella, the heroine's friend, and Arabella's father. The same pattern is found in Lady Julia Mandeville. Some characters in the novel protest about arranged marriages. Lady Anne Wilmot claims that she was a victim to the man her father arranged for her to marry. Now she is a widow, she is courted by Bellville, who makes this criticism of arranged marriage: "forced by the will of a tyrannic father to take on you an insupportable yoke; too young to assert the rights of humanity; the freedom of your will destroyed; the name of marriage is profaned by giving it to so detestable an union" (Lady Julia Mandeville, p. 178). Unlike Lady Anne and Bellville, Lady Julia has no protests to make about the condition of women.

This pattern is a reflection of the passive role of the ideal sentimental heroine. Unlike Richardson's heroines, the heroines of Brooke and Griffith have very little to say for themselves. Lady Julia writes only four of the letters in Lady Julia Mandeville, while Anne Wilmot writes thirty-six. In the longer novel Emily Montague the heroine writes a good deal more, thirty-nine letters altogether, but again she is outstripped by her friend. Arabella Fermor writes seventy-eight letters. In Emily we see that the sentimental heroine's passivity and her exclusive concern with love mean that she does not display all the usual traits of the sentimentalist. The descriptions of Canadian scenery, which have gained the novel some praise, are divided between Arabella and Edward Rivers. Emily, supposedly the more sensitive and romantic of the two women, leaves no record of her appreciation of the scenery. In Lady Juliana Harley, the heroine writes a long letter narrating her history, but otherwise writes little. Thus the heroine's silence on the topic of women's rights matches her silence on most other subjects. When she does express herself on paper, it is hardly ever to describe scenes, or other people, or to discuss general ideas. Her tender feelings provide her with her only topic.

Very occasionally the heroine protests about women's lot, but the way she does so reflects her exclusive concern with love. After a misunderstanding between Edward Rivers and herself Emily Montague writes to him, complaining: "How unjust are your sex in all their connexions with ours!" (Emily Montague, III, 1). This is protest in the tradition of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, whose work influences Brooke's. Riccoboni has been described as a feminist writer. J.C. Nicholls notes that "most of her novels were devoted to the theme of women exploited by a male-oriented

society".¹ Feminist protest in her work takes the form of expressions of anger at men's inconstancy and their deceit of the women who love them.² This kind of protest is clearly important; indeed, it is the novel's distinctive contribution to the feminist debate, since the problems of love are largely ignored in eighteenth-century feminist tracts. It is limited, however, because it is never extended into a criticism of the ideal of romantic love as women's fulfilment. Frances Brooke's and Elizabeth Griffith's interests in women's position are more wide-ranging than those of most sentimental novelists. They present arguments for better education for women, for the right to political representation, and for a limitation of the authority of parents and husbands. The idealized sentimental heroine, whose only concern is love, is not a useful vehicle of expression for the wide spectrum of their concerns, and their commitment to her prevents them from developing the idea that romantic love is not the solution to women's problems.

It might be argued that it is unnecessary for the heroine to make explicit comments on women's condition, because it is what happens to her that provides criticism of society. However,

¹J.C. Nicholls, ed., Mme Riccoboni's letters to David Hume, David Garrick and sir Robert Liston, 1764-1783, Vol. CXLIX of Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1976), Introduction, p. 25.

²An example is found in the novel which Frances Brooke translated: "Happy Men! what Advantage does Difference of Education, Prejudice, and Custom, give to that daring Sex, who blush at nothing, say and do whatever they please! What Arts will Man not practise, when impelled by Interest, or by Pride! He cringes at our Feet, without being ashamed; our Scorn does not abase him, our Disdain cannot repulse him: Mean when he desires, insolent when he hopes, ungrateful when he has obtained." Letters from Juliet Lady Catesby, To Her Friend Lady Henrietta Campley tr. Frances Brooke (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760), p. 34.

her silence does have serious implications for the message of her story. It is virtue which prevents her from making feminist statements. Her passivity and her preoccupation with love are seen as virtues. Her meekness, selflessness and devotion to duty also inhibit her. She is too timid to want independence, too gentle to assert her own rights, and too modest to believe herself the hero's equal.

A more assertive heroine is Lady Barton of Elizabeth Griffith's novel, who is married to a man she cannot love, and falls in love with Lord Lucan. Soon after her marriage she criticizes her husband's "illiberal sentiments" about women (Lady Barton, I, 2). Sir William Barton believes there is no such thing as true female friendship, and that women should not write to each other. Lady Barton disproves his theory by her sincere friendship for her correspondent, her sister Fanny Cleveland. At other points she mentions her vow of obedience with distaste, though she resolves to keep it. She complains of her husband's behaviour, changed since their marriage from gallant attentions to tyranny. It is clear that Lady Barton only makes these comments because she is, by the standards of ideal womanhood, a flawed character. She was not forced to marry Sir William, but agreed to marry, without loving him, because her vanity was flattered by his constant devotion. She has only herself to blame, then, when she discovers that she loves Lord Lucan. Her virtue ensures that their love remains innocent, but nevertheless love proves fatal. Sir William is led to suspect his wife's virtue, and there is a duel between Colonel Walter, who had slandered Lady Barton, and Lord Lucan. Colonel Walter is killed, and Lady Barton dies of "the gentlest of decays" (III, 294), evidently caused by the internal conflicts she has suffered, "the conflicts of a weak, not wicked mind" (III, 305). A virtuous

but flawed woman, Lady Barton is an exception among Elizabeth Griffith's heroines. Her imperfections are closely linked to the self-assertiveness which means that, unlike the idealized sentimental heroine, she is willing to complain about the disadvantages of a woman's position.

The ideal sentimental heroine is submissive, and her submissiveness tends to undermine feminism in Brooke's and Griffith's novels. If the most praiseworthy feminine virtues are those which preclude feminist protest, how seriously are we to take the claims for female emancipation which pervade the novels of both writers? The novels show a contradiction, probably not wholly recognized by the novelists themselves, between feminist ideas and feminine practice. In Emily Montague, we are given the hero's opinions on marriage. He believes that husband and wife should be equal, and that the woman should not vow obedience but retain the right to disagree with her husband. However, it is unlikely that Emily, whom Arabella mockingly calls a "poor tame household dove" (II, 117), will ever exercise such a prerogative. Another ideal sentimental heroine, Lady Juliana, shows virtue by submissiveness. Though she is an independent widow, she shows extreme deference to the wishes of her brother, whom she has just met for the first time in several years. She only objects when he tries to make her marry Lord Somners, and she writes that "there is but one subject on which I should feel it possible to dissent from his will, or to know that I had one of my own. I ask no dominion even over myself, but of the negative kind" (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 27). Lady Juliana Harley contains many feminist arguments, but its most virtuous woman is more than willing to submit herself to masculine authority.

The contrast between feminist ideas and ideal femininity is

clearly seen in a minor incident in Lady Juliana Harley. One of Charles Evelyn's sisters, Emma, is married to a man who gambles most of their money away and then has an affair with one of the villains of the novel, unscrupulous and unfeeling Mme du Pont. Charles reflects on the course a wife should follow in this situation. Even if her husband should repent, he does not think her love for him can be expected to survive. He asks:

can she look with fond respect upon the man who has taught her to think slightly of him? Impossible! The human heart is formed to feel, and when oppressed by unmerited sufferings, it will resent. Time's lenient power will no doubt abate the keen anguish of disappointed love -- Its cure at length is found in cold indifference . . . Such is the state of many a female heart; no wonder then if it should sometimes stray, and when rejected by its lawful lord, seek consolation in an alien's breast (II, 120).

His attitude is much more favourable to women than that found in the conduct books, which usually tell neglected wives that the fault is their own for failing to behave properly to their husbands by "studying their humours, overlooking their mistakes, submitting to their opinions in matters indifferent, passing by little instances of unevenness, caprice, or passion, [and] giving soft answers to hasty words".¹ Charles, in complete contrast to the accepted view that "the strayings of thy husband absolve thee not",² even suggests that a woman who abandons her unfaithful husband and takes a lover might be excusable. Emma's behaviour to her husband, however, is that recommended by the conduct book writers rather than by her brother. Her husband returns to her, and she writes:

¹Fordyce, Sermons to Young Women, II, 265.

²The Whole Duty of Woman By a Lady [really by William Kenrick] (London: R. Baldwin, 1753), p. 76.

I will watch over his dejected spirit, will pour the balm of tenderness upon his reclaimed heart, and speak of comfort to my afflicted mourner. These are the offices of virtuous love, the real proofs of conjugal affection; and most supremely happy do I think myself in being called to this delightful task (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 245-6).

Like the heroine, Emma is an idealized sentimental woman who cannot embody the feminist ideas which her author wishes to express.

As the ideal woman is unable to express Elizabeth Griffith's and Frances Brooke's interest in feminist concerns, this function is taken over by other characters. The arguments for women's rights already quoted are mainly taken from the letters of a hero or his friend, or from those of the lively female character who acts as a foil to the sentimental heroine. The hero is often useful as a mouthpiece for feminist ideas. Bold ideas are more acceptable in him than in the sentimental heroine. Edward Rivers supports a feminist stance, not only by his arguments but by his character. He is living proof that masculine and feminine qualities need not be so different as is commonly supposed. He has a "tenderness of soul, and almost female sensibility, which is so uncommon in a sex, whose whole education tends to harden their hearts" (Emily Montague, III, 121). It is because he partakes of women's sensibility that Edward is able to protest about the injustices of their condition.

The other representatives of feminist ideas, the lively female characters, are Lady Anne Wilmot in Lady Julia Mandeville, Arabella Fermor in Emily Montague,¹ and Lucy Evelyn in Lady

¹It may be coincidence that Brooke has given her character the same name as the Arabella Fermor who inspired Pope's creation of Belinda in The Rape of the Lock. However, as the revised version of the poem was published with a dedication to Arabella Fermor, her name would be known to its readers. See the introduction to The Rape of the Lock in The Poems of Alexander Pope Vol. II, ed. Tillotson (1940; rpt. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1966), pp. 81-105. In choosing this name, Brooke may intend to associate the coquetry and charm of Pope's Belinda with her own portrait of a lively female character.

Juliana Harley. They are descended from Richardson's Anna Howe and Charlotte Grandison, and are part of a tradition established in seventeenth-century drama, which often includes two contrasting heroines. The function of the lively woman is to criticize the sentimentality of the hero and heroine, and to show her own independent spirit in her reluctance to marry and submit herself to a man. Frances Brooke's Anne Wilmot, for example, mocks Henry and Julia Mandeville, and for most of the novel refuses to marry Bellville. Even when she has agreed to marry him she warns him that she may change her mind. She explains her unfavourable view of marriage to the hero, exclaiming "Jesu Maria! Only think of promising to be of the same mind as long as one lives!" (Lady Julia Mandeville, p. 143). The convention of the lively woman in comedy allows a claim for women's independence to be made, without implying serious criticism of the status quo. Anne Wilmot's flippant and capricious treatment of her lover is in this comic tradition. However, in Brooke's and Griffith's novels, the lively woman is also sometimes used as a serious spokeswoman for the more advanced feminist ideas of the eighteenth century. Lucy Evelyn criticizes Lady Juliana's submissive attitude, telling her that she should realize "that it is our submission which enables men to become tyrants" (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 31). Lucy sounds almost like Wollstonecraft in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman when she remarks, "I would wish my whole sex to think, act, and speak like rational beings, and not furnish the men with an excuse for treating us like babies while we are young, and despising us as ideots when we are no longer so" (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 33).

The heroine's lively friend often makes a more interesting character than the heroine herself. The heroines provide the titles for Lady Julia Mandeville, Emily Montague and Lady Juliana

Harley, but the reader is far more likely to remember the characters of Lady Anne Wilmot, Arabella Fermor, and Lucy Evelyn. Anne Wilmot, in particular, dominates Lady Julia Mandeville, and a case could be made for seeing her as the real heroine of the novel. She is the only character who develops. Her coquetry is replaced by true feeling when the tragic deaths of Henry and Julia teach her to value sentiment, and to appreciate Colonel Bellville's "tender sympathy of pitying friendship" (Lady Julia Mandeville, p. 207). In The Excursion, the dominance of the lively woman is complete. We are given the familiar contrast between two girls. "Louisa was mild, inactive, tender, romantic; Maria quick, impatient, sprightly, playful".¹ This time it is Maria, the lively woman, who is unequivocally the heroine of the novel.

The concentration on the lively woman in this novel is used not to make overt feminist statements, but to widen the range of experience within the novel. Maria is a virtuous but foolish young girl, whose adventures in London almost bring about her downfall. She persuades her guardian to let her travel alone to London, where she intends to stay with her friend Mrs. Herbert. When she discovers that Mrs. Herbert is in Paris, she stays alone in lodgings, and enters social life without a chaperone. She loses her money in gambling and extravagant purchases, and very nearly loses her reputation when she falls in love with Lord Melville, who only wants her as a mistress. Maria is saved from harm and eventually marries a worthy young man. The moral of her story is that she is to blame for her lack of discretion, but the ardent enthusiasm which led to her difficulties is presented as admirable. Maria hoped to achieve literary fame in London.

¹The Excursion (London: T. Cadell, 1777), I, 12.

She took with her her novel, her tragedy, and her epic poem, and we are told that these works are of great merit. Maria "had genius, that emanation of the Divinity, that fatal gift of heaven, pleasing to others, ruinous to its possessor" (The Excursion), I, 38). There are hints in Emily Montague of Brooke's interest in the problems of the female writer. Arabella mentions that she used to write poetry, but despite her father's encouragement she was afraid of showing him her poems, and so stopped writing (Emily Montague, IV, 165). In The Excursion Brooke develops this theme, writing of Maria's enthusiasm for writing and the difficulty she has in getting her work accepted. It is because Maria is a flawed heroine, not an ideal sentimental woman, that Brooke is able to use her in this way, to add new dimensions to female experience in the sentimental novel. It is unfortunate that the narrative of The Excursion, a much less polished production than Brooke's other novels, does not do justice to a new and interesting theme.

The idealized sentimental heroine undercuts the feminist concerns of Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith. The hero and the lively, less perfect female character are better instruments for their expression of feminist ideas. The flawed heroine is a better central figure when they wish to widen the scope of the sentimental novel and write of women's talents and women's adventures. However, this does not mean that in turning from the sentimental heroine to other characters they resolve the dilemma of sentimental idealization versus feminism. Their perception of woman as an ideal creature underlies each of their novels as a whole, and complicates their presentation of feminist ideas.

The defence of women given by the lively female character, for example, depends on a view of women as naturally superior to

men in virtue. In spite of her opposition to the heroine's meekness, the type of feminism she expresses is one which complements the novelist's use of an incredibly virtuous ideal heroine as a proof of women's worth. Arabella Fermor writes that virtues are natural to women. Women are religious and virtuous "less from principles founded on reasoning and argument, than from elegance of mind, delicacy of moral taste, and a certain quick perception of the beautiful and becoming in everything" (Emily Montague, I, 225). Although, in an age of sensibility, goodness as a result of instinct is valued above goodness produced by reasoning, this formula for female virtue leaves open the possibility that women may still be considered inferior to men in reasoning power. Arabella's idealization of women's natural sensibility also weakens her argument in favour of different modes of education. She complains that:

Every possible means is used, even from infancy, to soften the minds of women, and to harden those of men; the contrary endeavor might be of use, for the men creatures are unfeeling enough by nature, and we are born too tremblingly alive to love, and indeed to every soft affection (Emily Montague, II, 179).

Later in the century Mary Wollstonecraft was to argue with more conviction against the endeavour to soften women's minds. As Arabella, like everyone else in Emily Montague, is full of admiration for female softness, it is inconsistent for her to object to its being encouraged by education.

"We are a thousand times wiser, Lucy, than these important beings, these mighty lords", claims Arabella (II, 82). Her complacency about women, and her scorn of men, however, do not always help her to argue for improvements in women's lot. Instead of wishing that women, like men, could take part in politics, Arabella believes that women's concerns are more important. She writes, "I think no politics worth attending to

but those of the little commonwealth of woman: if I can maintain my empire over hearts, I leave the men to quarrel for everything else" (I, 206). What appears at first as a proclamation of female independence, really confines women to a narrow role. Their empire is only established through men's love for them. The commonwealth of women which seems to offer women independence is, as Arabella admits, a little one. Like the cult of the ideal heroine, the lively woman's scornful, playful attitude to men offers eighteenth-century women a sense of the superiority of their own sex, but only in those qualities defined as feminine. The lively woman does not encroach very far onto masculine territory.

The feminism of the sympathetic male characters is also compromised, because of the limitations of the chivalrous attitude on which it is based. Edward Rivers, for example, believes that women should be able to vote. The Indian tribe, he writes, is more civilized than his own country in this matter, and "we are the savages, who so impolitely deprive you [women] of the common rights of citizenship, and leave you no power but that of which we cannot deprive you, the resistless power of your charms" (Emily Montague, I, 69). Edward's support of women's rights is evidently closely connected to his susceptibility to their charms. When women's charms are considered "resistless" it always remains possible to argue that they need no other power. Though Edward does not reason in this way, his argument for women's rights is conducted in a gallant, almost bantering tone that takes away much of its power. He would like to see the Huron custom of women voting for the leader adopted in England, because "canvassing for elections would then be the most agreeable thing in the world, and I am sure the ladies would give their votes on much more generous principles than we do" (I, 69).

The chivalrous hero, devoted to women, translates the issue of their political rights into a question of mutual attraction and admiration.

The chivalry of the sympathetic male character also permeates his discussion of female education. Edward Rivers claims to be in favour of better education for women, but the reader may wonder why, considering that he is perfectly satisfied with women as they are, and loves "their sweet prattle beyond all the sense and learning in the world" (IV, 47). Charles Evelyn and William Stanley give more serious consideration to the question of female intelligence. Their discussion centres on the question of whether women's intellect is different in kind from men's. Evelyn argues that women's intelligence, though not inferior to men's, is less likely to inspire awe and "more capable of inspiring love" (Lady Juliana Harley, II, 14). He is convinced by Stanley's arguments that education, not nature, is responsible for the difference, and that men and women are equal in their natural capacities. However, having just agreed on the importance of improved education, Evelyn goes on to argue that women are in a superior position even without it:

the scale must necessarily preponderate in favour of the softer sex, since all we have left to put in equipoise against their "beauty, winning softness, and attractive grace", amounts to nothing more than bodily strength, and the few advantages that may be derived from a liberal education . . . To sum up all, women are, and ever have been, the sovereigns of the world (II, 67-8).

This complacent conclusion, while it praises women, implies that there is no need for any change in women's status and role in society.

Both chivalrous heroes and lively ladies, despite their bold claims for women, lend support to the acceptance of women's traditional position. The lively women base their claims for

their sex on a belief in female superiority in morality and sensibility, which explains why they intersperse feminist arguments with praise of traditionally feminine behaviour. The chivalrous male characters also base their respect for women on women's superior qualities, and in particular on the charm of feminine sensibility. William Stanley, for example, has such a great regard for female delicacy that the behaviour he recommends to women is in some instances as circumscribed as that prescribed by the most rigid conduct books. He believes that:

Too great freedom of speech or manner in a young woman, certainly lessens the respect which is otherwise due to her; it enfranchises the bounds that are placed between the sexes, puts them too much on a level, and tempts libertines to hazard improper freedoms, which though rejected and resented, necessarily sully the purity of female delicacy (Lady Juliana Harley, I, 117).

The superior position of the woman of sensibility is only given her while she fulfils the necessary requirements of female propriety.

The novels of Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith give us a detailed picture of the female sentimental novelist's attitude to women. We see in their depiction of perfect heroines the attraction of an idealized picture of femininity to eighteenth-century women who wished to obtain greater respect for their own sex. In their sentimental style and themes we see an attempt by eighteenth-century women writers to produce a suitable "feminine" manner, which they try to combine with feminist arguments. Their novels are full of contradictions, advocating women's rights at the same time as they praise feminine submissiveness. These contradictions might be seen simply as a function of the epistolary novel, which gives wide scope for the expression of opposing views. Certainly the various attitudes of different characters are contrasted to each other and are used to present

detailed discussions of complex problems. Fundamentally, however, the writers' own opinions on women's nature and role, expressed in various ways through their more sympathetic characters, are confused and self-contradictory. Both Brooke and Griffith consciously support eighteenth-century feminist arguments, but their adoption of the eighteenth century's ideal image of womanhood is less compatible with these arguments than they suppose. In Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith we see the female sentimental novelists writing in strong support of female emancipation, but we also see in them the reason why feminists at the end of the century turn against the feminine ideal.

CHAPTER 6

CHARLOTTE LENNOX

The novels of Sarah Fielding, Frances Brooke, and Elizabeth Griffith show us that when eighteenth-century women novelists write with the intention of defending and supporting their sex, their arguments are often weakened by their adherence to the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. In particular, their emphasis on the ideal woman's strict observance of the eighteenth-century code of female morality has an adverse effect on pleas for changes in women's position. These three writers, moreover, are exceptional in making a sustained attempt to present a defence of women. Many women novelists of the time do not break away from accepted rules of female conduct in any way. In view of this it may seem odd that eighteenth-century moralists persist in their denunciations of fiction as a serious threat to female morality. Mrs. Cartwright speaks for many of her contemporaries when she gives her opinion that novels and romances "tend only to vitiate [young women's] morals and corrupt their hearts".¹ How do they do so, when their maxims are so often in accordance with those of eighteenth-century conduct books for women?

One reason for the moral condemnation of sentimental novels has already been suggested in Chapter 3. The novel's emphasis on love made it a target for the moralists. "They are dangerous fictions, where love is the ruling passion", wrote Goldsmith.² Other writers were specific about the various dangers involved. The danger feared most was that reading novels about love would encourage young girls to yield to seducers or to marry against

¹Letters on Female Education, addressed to a Married Lady (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1777), p.17.

²From a letter written in the character of Lien Chi Altangi, in the Public Ledger, October 15, 1760. Rpt. in Ioan Williams, ed., Novel and Romance 1700-1800: A Documentary Record (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 232.

their parents' wishes. This fear was felt despite the fact that the sentimental novels in question explicitly warned against such courses. Gisborne believes that "the study of [novels] frequently creates a susceptibility of impression and a premature warmth of tender emotions, which . . . have been known to betray young women into a sudden attachment to persons unworthy of their affection, and thus to hurry them into marriages terminating in unhappiness".¹ Richard Berenger's more unusual criticism is that women who imbibe romantic ideas from novels will become fastidious, and lose the opportunity of marrying at all. He claims to know "several unmarried ladies, who in all probability had been long ago good wives and good mothers, if their imaginations had not been early perverted with the chimerical ideas of romantic love" found in fiction.² Even worse consequences are feared by one reviewer, who attributes a recent "alarming increase of prostitutes" to the habit of reading novels.³ One modern historian is inclined to agree with these moralists, and writes that the "romantic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has much to answer for in the way of disastrous love affairs and of imprudent and unhappy marriages".⁴ Whether novels had such extensive powers to change people's lives is debatable, but certainly a consensus emerges that novels about love are dangerous to young women.

The widespread belief that young girls will try to imitate the heroines of the fiction they read is the basis for many works of satire and burlesque in the eighteenth century. The heroine of Colman's play Polly Honeycombe declares her intention of

¹An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1797), p. 217.

²From The World 79 (July 4, 1754); in Novel and Romance 1700-1800, p. 214.

³General Magazine and Impartial Review 4 (1790), 158.

⁴Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, p. 286.

eloping like the heroines she admires. Sheridan's famous Lydia Languish, in The Rivals, whose opinions are formed by the sentimental novels she borrows from circulating libraries, is also determined that true love entails opposition to a parent's or guardian's wishes. These comedies ridicule the attitudes to love encouraged by sentimental fiction, and also show a more general criticism of fiction. W.F. Gallaway writes that the "vogue of the heroine whose head has been turned by fiction is a significant . . . illustration of the general feeling that imaginative literature would unfit the reader for common life";¹ and we can add that the female reader in particular is considered to be rendered unfit for common life by reading novels.

Some of the novel's critics make it clear that seduction is not the danger they fear for female readers, but rather dissatisfaction with ordinary life. A.L. Barbauld's essay on the novel contains perceptive analysis of the problems caused by reading sentimental novels. Novels "paint too high" the passion of love, and credit it with more power in the world than it actually possesses.² Barbauld does not fear the effect of novels on young girls' chastity. In fact, she believes that the young lady may be taught by novels to be virtuous and to treat her lover with appropriate reserve. It is the novel's false picture of life that she criticizes. Her account of the novel's escapism implies a rather sombre view of the prospects real life holds for its female readers. The female reader will be told of love, but she will not be taught what to do if she has no lover at all. Novels will not prepare her "for the neglect and tedium of life which she is perhaps doomed to encounter".³

¹"The Conservative Attitude toward Fiction, 1770-1830", PMLA 55 (1940), 1053.

²"On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing", p. 46.

³Barbauld, p. 51.

Barbauld's description of the contrast between the excitement of novels and the tedium of life reveals an important reason for eighteenth-century moralists to criticize the novel. It may be that underlying the critics' frequent expressions of concern for female readers' morals is their fear that extravagant accounts of romantic love contain a hidden protest against the real conditions of life, love and marriage for the eighteenth-century woman. The novels give women and romantic love an important place in the world, and this may make their female readers dissatisfied with their own powerlessness. An awareness of this is surely behind Berenger's idea that women who read romantic stories will be too affected by them to accept the kind of marriage that real life will offer them. Some sentimental novelists, as we have seen, disagree with the moralists about female conduct in love and marriage, and lay more emphasis on the necessity for marriage to be based on love. More important than these differences, however, is the importance given to women in novels. Even as the sentimental novel upholds traditional virtues in women, it provides a different view from that of the conduct book, because it dramatizes those virtues. There is a great difference between being told that "[i]t is not the argumentative but the sentimental talents, which give you that insight and those openings into the human heart, that lead to your principal ends as Women",¹ and reading a novel in which these sentimental talents in the heroine and other women are seen in operation, comforting aged parents, befriending young girls in distress, bringing about the reformation of libertines, and inducing adoration in heroes. Sentimental novels, dramatizing

¹Fordyce, Sermons, I, 273.

the miracles wrought by female virtue, offer a kind of fantasy of female power in contrast to the actual position of women in eighteenth-century society. Distrust and disapproval of this fantasy are perhaps the underlying reasons for moralists' persistent condemnation of the sentimental novel in the later years of the century.

Charlotte Lennox's comic novel The Female Quixote (1752) reveals her view of fiction as a fantasy of female power. Charlotte Lennox wrote several other novels, which are more typical of the sentimental novel of her time.¹ In The Female Quixote she shows herself aware of the basis of fiction's appeal to the young female reader, and ready to condemn it on moral grounds. Arabella, the heroine of The Female Quixote, is in the tradition of the comic heroine whose view of life has been coloured by the fiction she has read. It is the French heroic romance of the seventeenth century which is responsible for Arabella's delusions. She has grown up secluded from the world, has read the works of Madeleine de Scudéry and La Calprenède, and expects her own life to be like the lives of their heroines. She invents adventures for herself, believes nearly every man she meets to be in love with her, and attempts to exact scrupulous obedience from her real and supposed admirers. Arabella is modelled on Cervantes' Don Quixote, and she has her own Sancho Panza, her maid Lucy, whose credulous acceptance of Arabella's romantic ideas makes for comic situations. Arabella's romantic ideas continually clash with the realities of the world, but she clings stubbornly to her own interpretation of events.

Early in the novel, Hervey, a gentleman visiting near Arabella's home, takes an interest in her. Arabella interprets his transient attraction as the undying devotion of a romance hero.

¹They are The Life of Harriot Stuart (1750), Henrietta (1758), Sophia (1762), and Euphemia (1790). The History of Eliza (1766) may be hers.

When she hears that Hervey is ill, she believes it is through despair because she has returned his letter to her unopened. She commands her maid to write him a letter informing him that Arabella, though offended at his presumption in declaring love to her, does not wish his death. Lucy delivers the letter to her brother William, who is acquainted with Hervey, and asks him to take it to him. After reading the letter William decides it is nonsense, and does not give it to Hervey. Thus when Hervey recovers from his indisposition, which is only a headache, Arabella believes it is in consequence of her commands, which he has never even received. His recovery does not surprise her, for she believes that, like a heroine in romance, she has the power of life and death over her adorers. "When did you hear of a Lover dying through Despair, when his Mistress let him know it was her Pleasure he should live?" she asks Lucy.¹

Arabella's view of life clashes with reality again when she decides that Edward, one of her father's gardeners, is a nobleman in love with her, who has disguised himself as a servant in order to be near her. Such incidents are common in the romances she has read. The head gardener tells Arabella that he has discovered Edward at the fish pond. Arabella and her faithful servant immediately interpret this according to the code of romance:

O dear! interrupted Lucy, looking pitifully on her Lady, whose fair Bosom heaved with Compassion, I warrant he was going to make away with himself.

No, resumed the Gardener, smiling at the Mistake, he was only going to make away with some of the Carp (The Female Quixote, p. 25).

Arabella is not convinced. Edward is turned away from his employment, and when he is seen near her home some time later,

¹The Female Quixote ed. Margaret Dalziel (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 16.

Arabella is convinced he means to abduct her -- a misfortune which the heroines of romances suffer frequently. Running away from home to avoid Edward, Arabella sprains her ankle, and meets a stranger whom she immediately casts in the role of gallant rescuer. When she explains her plight to him, her romantic interpretation of the world causes misunderstandings. Arabella, living in the world of romance, puts a meaning on the word "servant" very different from the usual one. Edward approaches, and the stranger, "seeing a Man in Livery approaching them, asked her, If that was the Person she complained of; and if he was her Servant? If he is my Servant, Sir, replied she, blushing, he never had my Permission to be so; And, indeed, no one else can boast of my having granted them such a Liberty" (p. 100). A long conversation with Edward follows, in which the speakers are at cross purposes. Arabella is accusing him of coming in disguise to ravish her, and he believes she is accusing him of stealing the carp. Mundane reality keeps obtruding on Arabella's romantic visions in this way, with comic effect.

Within the comedy Lennox is also making a point about the moral dangers of Arabella's delusion. These moral dangers are not threats to Arabella's chastity. On the contrary, Arabella follows the strict code of the romance heroine, who is very reluctant to give any favour to her lover, even the favour of telling him that she does not wish his death. The chief moral danger in Arabella's obsession with the romances is egotism. Egotism is apparent in her readiness to believe that Hervey is dying for love of her, and that Edward is a nobleman in disguise intending to ravish her. Her assumption of command over her lovers, who she expects to be ready to live, die, or leave the country at her pleasure, shows the arrogance of the heroine of romance.

The serious moral consequences of this arrogance are made clear in a conversation between Arabella and Miss Glanville, the sister of Arabella's true lover. Arabella is comparing Glanville to the heroes of romance.

I consider, Madam, said Arabella, your Brother as a Man possessed of Virtue and Courage enough to undertake to kill all my Enemies and Persecutors, though I had ever so many; and I presume, he would be able to perform as many glorious Actions for my Service, as either Juba, Caesario, Artamenes, or Artaban, who, though not a Prince, was greater than any of them.

If those Persons you have named, said Miss Glanville, were Murderers, and made a Practice of killing People, I hope my Brother will be too wise to follow their Examples: A strange kind of Virtue and Courage indeed, to take away the Lives of one's Fellow-Creatures! (pp. 127-8).

Arabella's romantic delusions eventually cause so many complications that Glanville, in a moment of jealousy, does attack his rival, Sir George. Once convinced of the falsity of her romances, Arabella repents of her arrogant attitude. "I tremble indeed to think how nearly I have approached the Brink of Murder, when I thought myself only consulting my own Glory; but . . . I will never more demand or instigate Vengeance, nor consider my Punctilios as important enough to be ballanced against Life", she declares (p. 381).

Arabella is an "autocrat", as B.G. MacCarthy points out,¹ and at times her egotism renders her character unsympathetic. Ronald Paulson calls her a "monster of egotism or self-sufficiency".² Susan Auty, though she writes that at times Arabella's "arrogance becomes . . . unbearable to the reader", finds that on

¹The Later Women Novelists, p. 48.

²Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 276.

the whole her "charm far overpowers her outrageous blindness".¹ In my opinion Arabella's arrogance, though certainly criticized by Charlotte Lennox, is made acceptable because Lennox so clearly presents it as the result of a fantasy of power on the part of a heroine who in real life has very little power.

For example, Arabella's ideas about the proper behaviour of a lover certainly show arrogance. She expects extreme respect and submission, in imitation of the devotion of her favourite heroes to their mistresses. A lover should suffer in silence for years, since to make a declaration of love is an unpardonable affront unless excused by long devotion and some important service to the lady. Even then, he should apologise for the presumption of telling her that he loves her. Arabella praises Arontes in Madeleine de Scudéry's Clelia, who

did not discover his Passion . . . till, by the Services he did the noble Clelius, and his incomparable Daughter, he could plead some Title to their Esteem: he several times preserved the Life of that renowned Roman; delivered the beautiful Clelia when she was a Captive; . . . Nevertheless, she used him very harshly, when he first declared his Passion (p. 45).

However, Arabella's expectations are in comic contrast to her father's mundane plans for her. He recommends her to her cousin, Glanville, as a suitable wife, and allows "a few Weeks" for the courting (p. 31). Glanville's declaration of love to Arabella, made after a very short acquaintance, is, as Lennox ironically points out, a violation "of all those Laws of Gallantry and Respect, which decree a Lover to suffer whole Years in Silence before he declares his Flame to the divine Object that causes it; and then with awful Tremblings, and submissive Prostrations at the Feet of the offended Fair!" (p. 32). Arabella's egotism is

¹The Comic Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Novels (New York and London: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 71 and p. 66.

mocked in this scene, which reveals her true position of powerlessness. Glanville is so ignorant of the proper attitude of a lover that he first laughs at, and then resents, Arabella's haughty reception of his love. When she exercises her supposed prerogative of banishing him from her presence, she is forced to write and ask him to return, in obedience to her father's commands. Arabella's arrogance is not unbearable, because her commands have so little force.

Lennox's portrayal of Arabella is a comic exposé of romantic delusion, which shows the author's thorough understanding of the appeal of the romantic heroine's power to female readers who have very little power. Ian Watt has described the eighteenth-century popularity of heroines whose names suggest the conventions of courtly love and romance as a projection of women's aspirations, which were "too often thwarted by their actual subordinate position in society", onto powerful romantic heroines.¹ Arabella is clearly projecting her own aspirations onto the heroines of the French romances. Though she imagines herself the ruler of a world of romance, she is in fact the obedient daughter of a man who keeps her in almost total seclusion. Going to church is a privilege the marquis, her father, "sometimes allowed her" (p. 8), and an occasional ride in the countryside attended by servants is "the only Diversion she was allowed, or ever experienced" (p. 19). Her invention of desperate lovers, of adventures and of dangers is clearly a compensation for a sheltered and lonely life.

It is evident that the romances' appeal to Arabella lies not only in the power they appear to give her personally, but also in the powerful position they give to all women. Glanville's main objection to the romances Arabella loves, apart from their

¹"The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding", Review of English Studies, 25 (1949), 326.

tediousness, is that they "contradicted the known Facts in History, and assign'd the most ridiculous Causes for Things of the greatest Importance" (p. 273). The things of importance are wars, the actions of princes, and the division of kingdoms, and the ridiculous causes are all to do with the love of kings and princes for the heroines. Romances thus accord women the chief power over historical events, reducing men's activities in affairs of state to secondary importance. What Glanville objects to in the romances, Arabella glories in. She delights in her vision of women as rulers of men through romantic love. "How mean and insignificant . . . are the Titles bestow'd on other Monarchs compar'd with those which dignify the Sovereigns of Hearts, such as divine Arbitress of my Fate, Visible Divinity, Earthly Goddess, and many others equally sublime", she declares (p. 321). Women's sphere in the romances is not entirely confined to love. At one point in The Female Quixote, Miss Glanville asks Arabella if it is true that Amazon women went to war like men. Glanville is horrified by this "absurd Demand", but for Arabella this is "a favourite Subject started" and she insists that the valiant warrior-queen Thalestris was real (p. 205). The romances depict women as important figures in history, in opposition to orthodox histories which have little to say about women.¹

Though her heroine is deluded by seventeenth-century romances, not eighteenth-century novels, Charlotte Lennox's insights are relevant to the discussion of the appeal, so dangerous from the conventional moralist's point of view, of

¹Catherine Morland, a heroine deluded to a lesser extent by a later type of romance, has a similar reason for preferring fiction to history. In history she finds "the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all". Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, ed. John Davie (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 97.

sentimental novels in the late eighteenth century. In The Progress of Romance Clara Reeve criticizes The Female Quixote as out-of-date at the time it was written. One of her characters, Sophronia, remarks "the Satire of the Female Quixote seems in great measure to have lost its aim, because at the time it first appeared, the taste for those Romances was extinct, and the books exploded" (The Progress of Romance, II, 6.). This is an exaggerated view, and the romances Arabella reads were probably still being read in the later eighteenth century, though new novels were far more popular.¹ However, The Female Quixote's relevance does not rest on the continued popularity of the French romances themselves. More important is the point that the sentimental novels which were popular with young women in the late eighteenth century resemble the romances in their appeal.

Clara Reeve demonstrates this herself in The Progress of Romance. One of her characters, Hortensius, comments on the deplorable influence of fiction on young women.

A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues, -- she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation. -- If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments, -- that of desiring to spend his life with her, -- that is not sufficient, her vanity is disappointed, she expects to meet a Hero in Romance (II, 78).

Euphrasia, the character who represents Reeve, corrects Hortensius. She is interested in making the distinction between the romance and the novel, and she points out that a young woman in the late eighteenth century is looking not for a hero in romance but "a fine Gentleman in a Novel" (II, 78). Her comment

¹Margaret Dalziel writes that in Lennox's time "the French romances were still being read . . . people as disparate in station and taste as Fielding, Johnson, Horace Walpole, and Mrs. Chapone all read them in their youth, and were no doubt typical of many others who would enjoy the jokes in the Female Quixote with full understanding". Introduction to The Female Quixote, pp. xvii-xviii.

suggests that a hero in romance and a gentleman in an eighteenth-century novel have similar roles -- as adorers who will flatter the vanity of young women who want more than plainness and rationality. Henry Fielding, reviewing The Female Quixote, points out its contemporary significance. Though the manners of heroic romance, which are ridiculed in the novel, are "not at present greatly in fashion", the novel remains relevant because "our Author hath taken such Care throughout her Work, to expose all those Vices and Follies in her Sex which are chiefly predominant in our Days, that it will afford very useful Lessons to all those young Ladies who will peruse it with proper Attention".¹ The lesson of The Female Quixote, I would suggest, is not simply that the heroic romance induces follies in young girls, but that all fiction which centres on women and makes women important offers the female reader of the eighteenth century a taste of the power and adventure she is unlikely to find in life.

Séjourné writes that most women novelists from 1740 to 1800 had some debt to the seventeenth-century romance, which shaped their portrayal of the heroine and their attitude to life.² This debt is most clearly seen in the great similarity between the adoring and submissive attitude of the hero of the seventeenth-century romance and that of the hero of the women's sentimental novel of the eighteenth century. In Madeleine de Scudéry's Clelia, the lover's proper attitude of humility is displayed many times, and one lover tells his mistress, "the boldnesse which I assume in loving you, has no ingredient in it which can displease

¹Covent Garden Journal no. 24, March 24, 1752; in Covent Garden Journal ed. G.E. Jensen, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915), I, 282.

²See Séjourné, pp. 124-125.

you: for though I have a most tender passion towards you, yet I protest unto you, I do not desire any thing from you in my advantage, but onely that you will give me leave to adore you".¹ In Charlotte Smith's Desmond (1792), the hero's aim in life is to render service to the heroine, and he writes, "I am convinced, that my apprehensions of rendering myself unworthy of the esteem, which, I now believe, Geraldine feels for me, acts upon me as a sort of second conscience. -- What ought not that man to attempt, who dares hope ever to become worthy of her heart? -- But I dare not; nor do I ever trust myself with so presumptuous a thought".² The humility of the lover in the seventeenth-century romance is still important to the woman novelist of the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Unlike the heroines of romances, eighteenth-century heroines do not cause war and the downfall of kingdoms, but their power, within the more circumscribed world of the novel, is evident. Elizabeth Griffith's Charles Evelyn is as ready as any romance hero to leave the country to avoid offending his lady, whom he calls, in romance fashion, "arbitress of my fate!"³ Frances Brooke's Henry Mandeville is devoted to the heroine to such an extent that, he writes, "every action of my life is directed to the sole purpose of pleasing her; my noblest ambition is to be worthy her esteem".⁴ Sentimental heroes are almost as afraid to declare love as the heroes of romance, because "the timidity inseparable from love" makes them fear rejection.⁵ Sentimental

¹Clelia. An Excellent New Romance, dedicated to Mademoiselle de Longeville. The Third Volume. Written in French by the Exquisite Pen of Monsieur de Scudéry [really by Madeleine de Scudéry]. Trans. J. Davies (London: Humphrey Mosely and Tho. Dring, 1658), Book I, p. 37.

²Desmond (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1792), I, 160-1.

³Lady Juliana Harley, I, 140.

⁴Lady Julia Mandeville, p. 116.

⁵Emily Montague, II, 123.

heroines, then, are in many ways as powerful as the heroines of romance.

The power of the sentimental heroine differs from the romance heroine's power by being based less emphatically on her beauty and more on the moral influence which she is able to exert because of her outstanding virtue. Even Sarah Fielding, suspicious as she is of romantic conventions, allows Portia in The Cry and the heroine of Ophelia to have this sort of power. The power of the sentimental heroine, being based on her virtue and on the attractiveness of feminine virtue to men, is suspect from the point of view of eighteenth-century feminists. Nevertheless, it is a form of power, and it is as a fantasy of power that the sentimental heroine appeals to many eighteenth-century women readers.

Assessments of the moral attitudes of novelists in the eighteenth century are complicated because so many novelists explicitly support the same moral standards by which the critics condemn fiction. The Female Quixote, as a satire on certain tendencies in fiction, reveals the contradictions between romantic themes and eighteenth-century morality which sentimental novels attempt to conceal. Sentimental novels conceal their subversive appeals under a moralizing tone. Heroines are too virtuous to elope and they are extremely shocked at being abducted, but the frequency with which abductions occur suggests their appeal to novel-readers. The abduction of the heroine proves her irresistibility, and provides the reader with a safe glimpse of dangerous adventure.¹ Sentimental heroines do not

¹The Gothic novel contains a very similar appeal. Hazel Mews writes of the Gothic novel that "adventures and horrors viewed from a safe distance in the pages of the novel may have contained an element of compensation for lives lived in circumstances too sheltered and confined", an observation which can also be applied to the adventures in the sentimental novel and in the French romance. See Frail Vessels: Woman's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 25.

have Arabella's vanity in expecting every man they meet to fall in love with them, but this is often what happens in a sentimental novel. The plot of the sentimental novel often implies something very different from what is explicitly stated by the virtuous characters and in the author's commentary. Heroines are dutiful, obedient, and self-sacrificing, but the ending of the novel often grants them all their desires. Burlesque can expose the contradictions of the sentimental novel by attributing to the heroine the desire for power which the novel explicitly denies, but nevertheless satisfies.

The Female Quixote reveals that the female code of honour in the romance can be interpreted in ways which allow the heroine to do as she pleases. Arabella's code of conduct is much stricter than that of polite society in the eighteenth century, and when it suits her she applies it rigidly. She boasts that no man has obtained the favour of a private conversation with her. Glanville, vexed at never being able to speak to her without her having women in attendance, tries to persuade her that she "may hold a private Conversation with any Gentleman, without giving Offence to Decorum", but in vain (p. 31). However, Arabella's strict standards of virtue somehow allow her to do what she wants. For example, she persuades herself that it is her duty to go and visit Sir George, whom she believes to be dying of love for her. This is a great breach of modesty by eighteenth-century standards, but Arabella persuades herself that it is consistent with strict rectitude. She remembers that Amalazontha visited her lover, and even gave him hope, when he was dying, and decides that "it could be no Blemish to her Character, if she followed the Example of this most glorious Princess" (p. 180). Arabella uses the example of the romance to break the rules of decorum surrounding a young woman of the eighteenth century. Despotism over

lovers, disregard of parents' wishes, and participation in adventures, are all warranted by her interpretation of the romantic heroine's nature.

Eighteenth-century critics of the novel point out that the love-story threatens the notion of filial obedience. In The Female Quixote Charlotte Lennox demonstrates that the romantic code of propriety can be used to vindicate disobedience to parents. When Arabella is told by her father that he intends her to marry Glanville, the "Impropriety of receiving a Lover of a Father's recommending appeared in its strongest Light. What Lady in Romance ever married the Man that was chose for her?" (p. 27). Jane Austen makes a similar point in Love and Freindship where a young man tells his father, "Lady Dorothea is lovely and Engaging; I prefer no woman to her; but know Sir, that I scorn to marry her in compliance with your wishes. No! Never shall it be said that I obliged my Father".¹ These burlesques attribute open disobedience to the characters of romances and novels, in accordance with common eighteenth-century criticisms of these genres that they create opposition between parents and children over the question of marriage, and exalt those who place love before duty. In most sentimental novels, however, the heroine is a model of obedience, and if a novel is subversive of contemporary notions of filial duty, it is in a more indirect way.

In nearly all sentimental novels, the heroine expresses her submission to her parents and resolves never to marry without their consent, but her duty is often rewarded by marriage to the man of her choice, with all the promises of romantic happiness which moralists find so misleading. Lennox's own Henrietta gives us an example of this determination to enforce a strict notion of

¹The Works of Jane Austen ed. R.W. Chapman, Vol.6, Minor Works (1954; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 81.

a heroine's duty while fulfilling romantic expectations. Henrietta is in love with a marquis whose father opposes their marriage because of her poverty. Henrietta refuses to marry her lover without his father's consent, and puts herself under the protection of her brother, whom she promises to obey as if he were her father. Her brother, concerned for the family honour, is zealous in keeping the lovers apart while their marriage is contrary to filial duty. Henrietta's virtue and submission are eventually rewarded by a large sum of money and marriage to her marquis. The satire in The Female Quixote, though aimed at the heroic romance, is applicable to sentimental novels like Henrietta. The Female Quixote reveals through Arabella's delusions that such works are, as one critic has written, "direct effusions of fantasy (though their authors make moralistic claims for them)".¹

This contradiction in fiction which claims to be moral but really appeals to the passions is often criticized as hypocrisy in the eighteenth century. George Colman takes this view in the prologue to Polly Honeycombe, writing that novels are "So chaste, yet so bewitching all the while! / Plot, and elopement, passion, rape, and rapture, / The total sum of ev'ry dear -- dear -- Chapter".² Cowper criticizes novelists, "Who kindling a combustion of desire, / With some cold moral think to quench the fire".³ Many novelists, however, are sincere in their attempts to inculcate a suitable moral. Critics often acknowledge a novelists's moral intentions, and praise individual works for

¹P.M. Spacks, "Ev'ry Woman is at Heart a Rake", Eighteenth-Century Studies, 8 (1974-5), 39.

²Polly Honeycombe: A Dramatick Novel of One Act (London: T. Becket and T. Davies, 1760), Prologue, lines 26-28.

³"The Progress of Error", lines 319-20, in The Poems of William Cowper ed. John de Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 270.

their morality, but they nearly always assert that fiction in general threatens morality. The moralists' quarrel with the novel appears to be based less on the differences in the moral codes of novelists and moralists than on some element in the form of the novel which is incompatible with the morality many of the novelists are trying to teach.

The implication of The Female Quixote is that the heroine herself is the cause of the novel's suspect moral position. Arabella's egotism is only an exaggerated and conscious form of the importance every heroine must necessarily have. The ideal heroine is based on the popular ideal of womanhood, but in one respect she is incompatible with that ideal. Without violating any of the conduct book rules, she constitutes a threat to morality, simply by being a heroine. This is revealed in The Female Quixote when a benevolent countess, trying to cure Arabella of her obsession, presents her own calm, uneventful life as a model for the eighteenth-century woman. She explains to Arabella:

when I tell you . . . that I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper Education, receiv'd the Addresses of my Lord -- through the Recommendation of my Parents, and marry'd him with their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in great Harmony together, I have told you all the material Passages of my Life, which upon Enquiry you will find differ very little from those of other Women of the same Rank, who have a moderate Share of Sense, Prudence and Virtue (p. 327).

In effect, what the countess is telling Arabella, and by implication every eighteenth-century woman, is not to be a heroine. The smooth, monotonous life which she describes as the ideal one for a woman must be interrupted at some point in every eighteenth-century novel which takes the life of its heroine as its centre. In many novels the heroine is orphaned, and without the protection and direction of guardians the sequence of meeting

and marrying the right man cannot proceed with the smoothness the countess recommends. If the heroine has parents or a guardian, there is often a conflict between their choice of a husband for her, and her own. In this case, either the heroine is finally able to marry the man of her choice, or she marries the man her parents choose, out of a sense of duty. In either case her experience is a violation of the countess's ideal of an uneventful life. Without such ruptures in the ideal progress of a young woman's life, she could not be the heroine of a sentimental novel. There would be nothing to say about her.

The countess also advises Arabella not to refer to women's "adventures" any more. Adventures, when they happen to heroines of romance, mean abductions, travel in strange lands, and disguises, and they never derogate from a heroine's honour. In eighteenth-century parlance, the countess reveals to Arabella, the word "adventures" in connection with women refers to illicit sexual relationships. "The Word Adventures carries in it so free and licentious a Sound in the Apprehensions of People at this Period of Time, that it can hardly with Propriety be apply'd to those few and natural Incidents which compose the History of a Woman of Honour" (p. 327). What then can become of the female quixote, the subtitle of whose story is The Adventures of Arabella? She will have to relinquish the role of heroine and learn that "the 'history' of a virtuous woman is a nonsense and she is condemned to remain anonymous".¹ She has resisted all attempts to teach her this because she wants to remain a heroine. When she eventually realizes that her romances are not true, and subsequently agrees to marry Glanville, her story, and her

¹P.M. Hall, "Duclos's Histoire de Madame de Luz: Woman and History", in Woman and Society in Eighteenth-Century France, p. 140.

existence as a heroine, are at an end.

The comedy of The Female Quixote, then, contains a stern moral message. Any woman whose life is eventful enough to be the subject of a novel has compromised female virtue. P.M. Hall sums up the moral objection to fiction, writing that to hostile critics the novel was "doubly condemnable, committed as it was to the representation of women: immoral because it introduced women of, by definition, suspect virtue and compounding this by elevating them to a position of superiority".¹ The Female Quixote, by making apparent the moral dangers implicit in the very existence of the heroine, enables us to understand the reasons behind the eighteenth-century moralists' condemnation of sentimental novels, even those written to inculcate morality.

Lennox's burlesque reveals what sentimental novelists try to conceal. Their heroines, unlike Arabella, do not glory in their role. The typical sentimental heroine prefers to live alone in country seclusion, often in contrast to a less estimable female character who is eager to appear in fashionable life. Agreeing with eighteenth-century moralists that "True female Merit strives, to be conceal'd",² the sentimental heroine nevertheless finds herself impelled by the plot to be seen and known. Charlotte Smith's Emmeline, for example, is brought up in an isolated castle with only the housekeeper and the steward for company, but the appearance of Delamere on the scene soon destroys the tranquillity of her life. His instant infatuation for her forces her into the role of heroine, and her life thereafter is full of incidents which Charlotte Lennox's countess would find quite incompatible with the proper life of a sensible woman.³

¹"Duclos's Histoire de Madame de Luz: Woman and History", p.140

²Thomas Marriott, Female Conduct p. 60.

³See Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle (1788), ed. A.H. Ehrenpreis (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

The contrast between a heroine's destiny of fame and her desire for obscurity is revealed in the opening letter of Clarissa.

Anna Howe writes to the heroine:

I know how it must hurt you to become the subject of the public talk: And yet upon an occasion so generally known, it is impossible but that whatever relates to a young Lady whose distinguished merits have made her the public care, should engage every-body's attention.¹

Clarissa, as a modest woman, does not wish to become the subject of public talk, but it is only by her becoming so that the novel can be written and the most famous exemplary heroine of the century be created.

Among women novelists of the late eighteenth century are many who agree with the critics about the moral dangers of fiction, and make a conscious effort to provide an alternative to the plots which make romantic love and the heroine's power over her lover central features. Several novelists write with definite anti-romantic intentions. Mrs. Keir's History of Miss Greville is intended to demonstrate that "honour, gratitude, and above all, a sense of religion, are sufficient to conquer even the most ardent passion, when to indulge it is no longer consistent with virtue".² The heroine marries Sir Charles Mortimer from a sense of duty, overcomes her attachment to her first love, George Rivers, and is rewarded with a happy marriage. Charlotte Lennox's last novel, Euphemia (1790), upsets the usual conventions of romance in novels. Euphemia marries Mr. Neville, whom she does not love, and bears with his follies and bad temper in exemplary fashion. She does not meet a lover, nor does her husband die and leave her free. Her reward for a life of virtue is to have the direction of her

¹Clarissa, I, 1.

²The History of Miss Greville (Edinburgh: E. Balfour and W. Creech, 1787), I, vi.

son's education, and to meet her old friend Maria Harley again. The conclusion is one of cheerful resignation rather than romantic happiness.

Moral tales of this kind certainly overcome the objection that novels place passion before duty and encourage young girls to have great expectations of romance. However, the central character, dutiful and resigned as she is, is still a heroine, and she is idealized in a way that is incompatible with the eighteenth-century belief in female self-abnegation. In Euphemia, for example, Maria Harley is eloquent on the subject of her friend's heroism, and tells her, "To die for the man one loves is not an act of such heroism, as to chuse misery with the man one has no reason to love, because we consider it to be our duty to do so".¹ However conservative the moral of a sentimental novel, because it has a heroine it necessarily implies some compromise of the eighteenth-century belief that a truly virtuous woman should be unpraised and unknown.²

Even The Female Quixote itself, which makes comedy out of Arabella's ridiculous attempts to imitate the heroines of romance, is not entirely without this kind of compromise. English Showalter writes that the satire in comic novels like Don Quixote is often not sustained throughout the work, explaining that

It is as if the novelist had been caught in his own trap. In order to oppose reality to the romance, he had to find some literary representation of it; and then it turns out that his representation has great powers of persuasion. Hence the satire recedes and more straightforward narration takes its place.³

¹Euphemia (London: T. Cadell and J. Evans, 1790), I, 63-4.

²See the discussion of Clara Reeve's novels below, Chapter 7.

³The Evolution of the French Novel 1641-1782 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 83-4.

Charlotte Lennox, too, is caught in her own trap. The Female Quixote is not only a satire on Arabella's imaginary adventures, it is the story of her actual courtship and marriage. Arabella is necessarily at the centre of this story, and she becomes a real heroine instead of a pretended one.

Arabella's eagerness to anticipate abductions and flee from ravishers is one of the targets of Lennox's mockery, but when she absurdly flees from Edward, the gardener, she very nearly meets with a real adventure. The gentleman who finds her when she has hurt her ankle is "extremely glad at having so beautiful a Creature in his Power" (p. 100). They drive off in his chaise, and Arabella is only saved because the chaise overturns and Glanville arrives on the scene. Though Arabella comically fails to recognise the fact, Glanville performs the romance hero's important function of saving the heroine from a ravisher. In order to contrast real dangers with Arabella's absurd expectations of danger Lennox has had to introduce a representation of danger into her novel. The sinister gentleman in the chaise is not one of the romantic ravishers whom Arabella expects to meet, but he is a figure reminiscent of the typical rake of eighteenth-century novels. Lennox mocks the conventions of romance, but she introduces the not entirely dissimilar conventions of the sentimental novel.

Like the Don on whom she is modelled, Arabella is a sympathetic as well as a comic character. In her introduction to The Female Quixote, Margaret Dalziel writes that Charlotte Lennox totally rejects the morality of the romances she satirizes, and that "in contrast with Cervantes she has over-simplified the experience of her central character, and lost opportunities of giving her positive and endearing qualities" (p. xvi). In my view Dalziel underestimates the degree of sympathy in Lennox's

portrait of Arabella. Not only ignorance, but good-nature is implied in Arabella's false interpretation of Mrs. Morris's narrative of Miss Groves's adventures, which include bearing two illegitimate children. Ever ready to befriend and praise a fellow heroine, Arabella is sure Miss Groves has been deceived by a secret marriage, later denied, as, in the romance version of her story. Cleopatra was by Caesar. Mrs. Morris is disappointed to find that Arabella "seemed so little sensible of the Pleasure of Scandal, as to be wholly ignorant of its Nature; and not to know when it was told her" (p. 77). Lennox stresses that apart from her belief in romances, Arabella is a sensible and well-informed young woman. Arabella's endearing qualities are seen when she is compared to Miss Glanville, a vain, fashionable young woman. The reactions of these two when they first meet show Miss Glanville's envious and petty disposition in contrast to Arabella's romantic generosity:

As Miss Charlotte had a large Share of Coquetry in her Composition, and was fond of Beauty in none of her own Sex but herself, she was sorry to see Lady Bella possessed of so great a Share . . .

Arabella, on the contrary, was highly pleased with Miss Glanville; and, finding her Person very agreeable, did not fail to commend her Beauty: a sort of Complaisance mightily in Use among the Heroines, who knew not what Envy or Emulation meant (p. 80).

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The contrast between Arabella's behaviour and that of the young ladies she meets in Bath and London is used as a comment on the corruption of fashionable life. In these scenes Arabella, like a typical sentimental heroine, represents the value of natural goodness of heart. She appealed to Richardson, who wrote to Lady Bradshaigh, "[d]o you not think, however [Charlotte Lennox's] heroine over-acts her part, that Arabella is amiable and innocent?"¹

¹Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, p. 223.

Lennox's satirical purpose wavers when incidents like the death of Arabella's father turn the comic narrative into a serious one. In these scenes the fundamental goodness beneath Arabella's heroic pose is most apparent. Her father is suddenly taken ill, and

Arabella's extreme Tenderness upon this Occasion, her anxious Solicitude, her pious Cares, and never-ceasing Attendance at the Bedside of her sick Father, were so many new Charms, that engaged the Affection of Glanville more strongly. As the Marquis's Indisposition increased, so did her Care and Assiduity: She would not allow any one to give him any thing but herself; bore all the pettish Humours of a sick Man with a surprising Sweetness and Patience; watched whole Nights, successively, by his Bedside . . . (p. 58).

In this scene Arabella steps out of romance, not into reality but into the sentimental novel.

The Female Quixote, being a sentimental as well as a comic novel, offers its readers some of the very dreams of a heroine's power which Arabella is censured for taking from the heroic romance. Glanville loves her in spite of her folly, and in the hope of being accepted by her he is forced to adopt the respectful distance she requires in a suitor. After his first declaration of love, "he stood in such Awe of her, and dreaded so much another Banishment, that he did not dare, otherwise than by distant Hints, to mention his Passion" (p. 81). At times his attitude approaches the submission the romances require. It is fear for her intellects rather than remorse that affects him when she accuses him of perfidy, but his reaction is very like that of a submissive lover in a romance -- or in a sentimental novel.

[He] threw himself on his Knees before her, and taking her Hand, which he tenderly prest to his Lips,

Good God! my dearest Cousin, said he, How you distract me by this Behaviour! . . . Can I have offended you so much? -- Speak, dear Madam -- Let me know my Crime. Yet may I perish if I am conscious of any towards you -- (p. 352).

Arabella does not relinquish her role as heroine until she is secure of love from one who offers all the devotion of a sentimental hero. Despite the conservative moral view put forward by Charlotte Lennox in The Female Quixote, her own work is a sentimental novel which illustrates the sentimental novel's "dangerous" tendencies. Simply by centring on the heroine, it attributes to women an importance and a power which conservative moralists in the eighteenth century deplore.

CHAPTER 7

CLARA REEVE AND HARRIET LEE

In the late eighteenth century, sentimentalism both flourished and came under attack. Erik Erämetsä writes that sensibility was becoming disreputably associated with dissimulation and insincerity.¹ "False" and "excessive" sensibility were attacked, "sometimes in the name of common sense and sometimes in that of true sensibility".² R.F. Brissenden writes about the parallel development of sentimentalism and the criticism of it in the later decades of the century. By the late 1760s, he writes, the word "sentimental" was "beginning to take on the meaning current today -- 'addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion; apt to be swayed by sentiment'".³ Using "sentimental" in this modern sense, he argues that "the novels written between 1770 and 1790 are on the whole more sentimental than those written between 1740 and 1760. The ten years from 1760 to 1770 may be regarded as a transition period. . . . Yet even [during this time] criticism of sentimentalism began to take shape".⁴ F.G. Black finds the decade 1781-90 important for the development of criticism of sensibility. Writing about the epistolary novel of the 1780s, he notes that "on the whole this is the period of sentimentalism", but also that there is "a feeling of distrust towards sentiment, . . . "sentiment" and "sentimental" in the titles are tied up almost uniformly with "unfortunate", "excessive", "illusion", "deceiver"". ⁵ Titles of

¹Erämetsä, p. 58.

²Tompkins, p. 109.

³Brissenden, Virtue in Distress, p. 99.

⁴Brissenden, p. 105.

⁵Black, The Epistolary Novel, p. 28 and p. 24.

novels of the eighties such as Excessive Sensibility (1782), Sentimental Deceiver; or the History of Miss Hammond (1784), The Unfortunate Sensibility; or the Life of Mrs. L. (1784), The Curse of Sentiment (1787), and The Illusions of Sentiment (1788), illustrate his point. In the 1780s the sentimental novel became increasingly sensational. There were many imitations of Prévost, D'Arnaud, and other French sentimentalists, and Werther was translated and imitated. J.R. Foster emphasizes this aspect of the decade, in which "emotional temperatures rose". However, if the last two decades of the century "marked the hey-day of the ultra-sentimental novel and the roman noir or 'Gothic' romance",¹ it is also true that in the same period, "[t]he dangers inherent in the sentimental point of view were early pointed out".²

The novels of Harriet Lee and Clara Reeve illustrate the mingling of various attitudes to sentimentalism at this time. Both felt the influence of the French sentimentalists. Clara Reeve's The Exiles; or Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt (1788) is based on D'Arnaud's D'Almanzi, Anecdote Française (1776), while Marmontel and D'Arnaud provide models for the Canterbury Tales (1797-1805), chiefly written by Harriet Lee. Yet both writers make criticisms of sentimentality. Harriet Lee makes her heroine in Errors of Innocence (1786) insist that her own emotion has no connection with the excesses of "French authors; blending sense into sentiment, and leading us into the worst romance, that of a heated imagination. Impassion'd sentiment, is even dangerous".³ In her preface to The School for Widows (1791), Clara Reeve

¹Foster, History of the Pre-Romantic Novel, p. 186.

²Black, p. 24.

³The Errors of Innocence (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1786), III, 185.

complains that the word sentiment has degenerated and "given rise to a great number of whining, maudlin stories, full of false sentiment and false delicacy, calculated to excite a kind of morbid sensibility, which is to faint under every ideal distress, and every fantastical trial; which have a tendency to weaken the mind, and to deprive it of those resources which Nature intended it should find within itself".¹ These two criticisms are typical of attacks on sensibility at the time. Harriet Lee's comment hints at the danger to chastity involved in rousing the passions by too much sentimentality, and Clara Reeve's echoes a common fear that sentimentalism would weaken the mind and unfit it for coping with the problems of everyday life. Both of these dangers are seen at this time to be particularly threatening to women.

These are criticisms which suggest that Harriet Lee and Clara Reeve wished to control sentimentalism by didacticism. Sentiment and didacticism, however, are by no means opposed concepts, as we can see in the moral sentimentalism of Richardson and in many of his admirers, including Sarah Fielding. Harriet Lee's work has an affinity with these earlier works of sentiment. Black points out that her Errors of Innocence is a work "expressing 'sentiments' (in the eighteenth-century sense) rather than displaying trite sentimentality . . . [the author has] adorned her work deliberately with condensed expressions of sentiment".² While Lee's work displays more concern for the romantic love-plot, and a greater tendency to idealize the sentimental heroine, than Reeve's, it is similarly concerned with didacticism, and uses the concept of female sensibility to establish a strict morality

¹The School for Widows (London: T. Hookham; Harrison and Co., and W. Miller, 1791), I, vi.

²Black, p. 21.

applicable to women. Reeve, if less concerned with dramatizing feminine sensibility, is still a sentimentalist as well as a moralist. Both writers are sentimental and didactic, both present a sentimental ideal of femininity and moralize about women's conduct. Their novels give us some insight into the complex relationship between sentimentalism, didacticism, and ideals of womanhood in the late eighteenth century.

This study will concentrate on those novels with a domestic setting, Lee's Errors of Innocence, and Reeve's The Two Mentors (1783) and The School for Widows, because they emphasize female conduct as a central theme. Errors of Innocence and The School for Widows centre on female protagonists. The Two Mentors focuses on the hero, but women's influence is of central importance to his education in virtue. Though the novels are chosen for this particular emphasis, concentrating on them should not distort the writers' positions as regards sentimentalism and morality. Both writers, indeed, are better known for their contribution to the Gothic. Clara Reeve is usually remembered as the author of The Old English Baron, first published in 1777 as The Champion of Virtue. The novel is famous, however, precisely because of its domestication of the Gothic, its toning-down of the supernatural and terrifying in favour of presenting an eighteenth-century, middle-class morality. It helped establish the type of Gothic novel, written particularly by women, which is, in Foster's words, "a sentimental novel in which the characters are tricked out in costumes belonging to some past epoch but rarely concealing the fact that the minds and manners of the wearers really belong to the century of enlightenment".¹ Her Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon, in a similar way, engrafts eighteenth-century morality onto a tale of the past, with more

¹Foster, p. 186.

emphasis this time on female conduct. Harriet Lee, together with her sister Sophia, is credited with an "epoch-making" part in the development of Gothic,¹ but it was Sophia Lee who wrote The Recess (1783-5), and Harriet Lee's contribution to Gothic came later, in some of the stories of the Canterbury Tales. The best of these, Kruitznier; or, the German's Tale (1801), is a different kind of Gothic tale. A study of the hero-villain, it fascinated Byron, who used it as a basis for his Werner (1821). It is Harriet Lee's earlier, domestic novel which is relevant to a study of attitudes to sentimentalism and morality in the late eighteenth century.

It might be argued that Clara Reeve's The Exiles shows her more as a writer in the sentimental tradition than the novels chosen. Foster's comment on Reeve's criticisms of sentimentalism in The School for Widows is: "It seems it had totally slipped her mind that she had written the ultra-sentimental The Exiles".² It is true that The Exiles, influenced by D'Arnaud's D'Almanzi,³ and by his Le Comte de Gleichen and Prévost's Doyen de Killerraine,⁴ is much more sensational than her other novels. The young chevalier de Cronstadt secretly marries Jacquelina, a girl of low birth, and is later persuaded to marry Melusina, a more suitable match in terms of birth and fortune. Jacquelina discovers the bigamy and dies after a melodramatic reconciliation with Cronstadt. Cronstadt, heartbroken, does not survive her long. Though the plot has the extravagances of its French sources, Reeve's attitude

¹E.A. Baker, The Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance, p. 181.

²Foster, p. 202.

³See Foster, p. 204.

⁴See James Trainer, Introduction to The Old English Baron (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. xiii.

in this novel is not significantly different from her attitude in the domestic novels. Josephine Grieder has pointed out that even the sensational French novelists "did, of course, acknowledge that sensibility, in order to manifest itself justly, should be properly restrained",¹ and Reeve draws such a moral in The Exiles. While the French sentimentalists, however, were inclined to tolerate "situations which out of context might have seemed immoral or aberrant: marriage unsanctified by the church; illegitimacy; bigamy; even incest" because the offending characters' "sensibility, always alive to natural impulse, guaranteed them an innocent purity",² Clara Reeve was not. There is some sympathy for the erring Count de Cronstadt, but more for the friends who tell him to stop wallowing in grief and attend to the practical duty of providing for the children of both his marriages. It is significant that she alters her sources to make a moral point. Whereas the second wife in D'Almanzi is an unsympathetic character, Melusina in The Exiles is a paragon whose virtue calls forth the comment: "It is the woman a man marries that decides his fate. Understanding, modesty, and simplicity of manners, are the great requisites".³ The good influence of a virtuous woman on male conduct is stressed throughout The Exiles, making it in its moral preoccupations very similar to The Two Mentors. When Cronstadt's cynical uncle tells him that "women are all alike" (The Exiles, I, 53), the nephew insists on the difference between "a virtuous matron and a vile prostitute" (I, 55). The sharp distinction between good and bad women is equally important in The Two Mentors, with its

¹Translations of French Sentimental Prose Fiction in late Eighteenth-Century England: The History of a Literary Vogue (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975), p. 44, n. 2.

²Grieder, p. 49.

³The Exiles; or, Memoirs of the Count de Cronstadt (London: T. Hookham, 1788), III, 260.

quieter domestic setting, and this similarity of concern shows that in The Exiles, despite the influence of French sentimentalism, Reeve takes a moral position similar to that of her other novels.

The Two Mentors, The School for Widows and The Errors of Innocence illuminate aspects of the sentimental and didactic novel's presentation of an ideal of femininity in the 1780s and early 90s. The Errors of Innocence is the most typical sentimental novel of the three. It is told in letters, mainly between the heroine, Sophia Vernon, and her friend Lady Helen, and it deals with the heroine's entangled love-story and her distresses. She loves Henry Herbert Erskine, later Lord Melross, but a number of misunderstandings, facilitated by their delicacy and by the duplicity of the villain, Obrien [sic], keep them apart. The chief error of innocence is Sophia's, when, moved to pity by Obrien's apparently mortal illness, she agrees to marry him to console him in his dying moments. The illness is a trick, and Sophia's compassion has betrayed her into a miserable marriage. Her trials continue as she experiences Melross's loss of esteem, and his consequent attempt to seduce her. Her indignant rejection restores his belief in her virtue, and his love for her, but this does not make her happy. She is still tied to Obrien, and Melross has married the frivolous Janetta Sutherland. After many vicissitudes Obrien and Janetta are both dead, and Sophia marries her first love. Lady Helen's letter to Sophia, when first she suspects that Obrien's illness is faked, illustrates the novel's stress on the dangers and the values of feminine sensibility. She writes: "Oh! my dear, my too noble and generous friend, where has your caution slept? What fatal sensibility, what treacherous benevolence has sacrificed you to villainy and art!" (The Errors of Innocence, I, 263). Virtuous sensibility causes the heroine's unhappiness in the novel, but is not on that account to be

rejected. Caution is not always possible for a noble and generous heroine, and sensibility, even when fatal, is to be preferred to its alternative, villainy.

The heroine and her friend are idealized in terms of sensibility, which is their chief attraction and virtue. The hero, describing Sophia, relates how he has been captivated by "those eyes whose every glance beams mind, and that cheek whose varying vermillion seems but it's rich essence, warm from the heart" (I, 122). Here, physiognomy is a true indication of the mind and heart, which are united. Lady Helen's face also expresses her sensibility. She has "soft retiring eyes, in which all the purity of her mind is collected" (I, 93). There is emphasis on the attractiveness of fear, unhappiness and weakness in these young women of sensibility, an emphasis typical of sentimental novels towards the end of the century, when "the distresses -- and the constitutions -- of the heroines become progressively more delicate".¹ The hero notices that when Lady Helen is in distress, "a glow of terror and surprise [gives] that lustre of sensibility to her charms, which never fails to double them" (I, 128). She tells him her troubles, caused by her secret marriage to Edward Nugent, and he agrees to leave her to herself, to avoid witnessing "an indisposition that renders you but too interesting" (I, 147). The heroine also charms because of her unhappiness and declining health. Edward Nugent reports that "a tender humility, a softness, that speaks in that smile which only marks the utter extinction of cheerfulness, is, to me, a more interesting expression, than any, youth, or vivacity, can bestow" (III, 43-4).

Idealized in terms of sensibility which guarantees both virtue and an accompanying weakness, the heroine of Errors of

¹Brissenden, Virtue in Distress, p. 115.

Innocence represents a passive and submissive ideal of femininity. One of the most interesting aspects of the novel, in fact, is its revelation of the anti-feminist possibilities of the sentimental ideal. Most women novelists of the late eighteenth century make claims for women's intelligence, and Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith, as we have seen, do so through their presentation of the sentimental ideal. Harriet Lee does not. Far from arguing for better education for women, Sophia Vernon writes:

A warm heart and a gentle temper, are the compounds which alone produce perfection; . . . Nor should I so highly esteem even my best beloved friend, if I did not believe the sweetness of her disposition would perpetually temper the keenness of her understanding, and thus breathe over it that feminine softness, by which alone we can be truly charming (I, 119).

Intelligence in women must be moderated in the interests of feminine charm.

The portrait of Janetta Sutherland illustrates most clearly the anti-feminist implications of Harriet Lee's version of sensibility. We are warned that she is not an admirable character by Sophia's description of her lack of sensibility. Janetta "has some refinement in her head, but it never reach'd the heart: and with a good deal of feeling, little sensibility" (I, 46). Her vanity, superficiality, and fondness for dress and jewels are the natural results of her deficiency in sensibility. Her failure to be overwhelmed with sensibility at her marriage with Lord Melross augurs badly for their future together. She is criticized for being "[t]oo easy, too elegant, too much like herself", and though she "smil'd on him with all the softness of love . . . it was not with that distinguishing and timid love, which blushes at the gaze it solicits" (III, 56-7). Janetta's failure to achieve blushing timidity is sufficient warning, by the standards of this novel, of her essential worthlessness, and

it is no surprise when she commits adultery with Obrien.

The author's attitude to Janetta's adultery is one of total condemnation. Lord Melross is considered justified in confining her to her room, and taking away her fine clothes and jewels. Her protest, "Was ever woman us'd as I have been! to confine me! to take away my cloaths! . . . oblige me to wear these despicable ensigns of indigence, and disgrace!" (IV, 69) is seen as the result of ridiculous vanity. Janetta is the nearest approach to a feminist spokeswoman in the novel, and her protests are presented as ridiculous. When her husband imprisons her she cries, "how dare lord Melross use me thus, Sir? Am I not his equal?" (IV, 71), and the reader is meant to recognize that her claim is absurd. To point the contrast between her attitude and the virtuous submission of the heroine, Obrien, for no apparent reason, is made to imprison his wife in a similar manner and to give her russet clothes to wear. Sophia's cheerful submission to this unreasonable treatment contrasts with guilty Janetta's refusal to accept punishment. Janetta's claim to be ill during her imprisonment is seen as an extravagant pretence; and though, in fact, she dies soon afterwards, after giving birth prematurely to a dead child, this is presented as her own fault entirely. She runs away with Obrien, and this flight, not her previous imprisonment, proves fatal. Her husband's reaction to the news of her death shows no doubt about where the blame lies: "Unfortunate Janetta! -- Why -- but she made her own fate" (IV, 180).

All Janetta's faults arise from her initial lack of feminine sensibility, seen in this novel to imply a high degree of submissiveness. It is significant that the lively rejection of a ridiculous suitor, often performed by a virtuous girl in eighteenth-century novels, is performed in this novel by a

villainess. Sir George Irwin, well-meaning but unprepossessing, thinks that Janetta might have shown more gratitude for his choosing her, to which she replies, "for chusing me! Why do you really imagine you have bought me at some market in Constantinople?" (I, 87). In most contemporary novels such a thrust would have the author's approval, but in The Errors of Innocence this show of spirit is compromised by coming from Janetta, who is later established as a heartless, insensitive character. When Sophia describes Janetta as having feeling but no sensibility, she draws a distinction between the two qualities based on the greater gentleness and selflessness of sensibility:

By sensibility I understand a certain tender sympathy of disposition, which tho' originally deriv'd from the passions, is meliorated into somewhat gentler and more pleasing than those, whilst feeling is that quick sense of insult or injury which is exerted rather for ourselves than others (I, 46).

Janetta's "feeling" implies an unfeminine selfishness, and manifests itself in displays of passion in which all control is lost, until there is "scarce an excess, to which this de[li]rium [does] not seem capable of carrying her" (IV, 27).

Sensibility in The Errors of Innocence is defined in opposition to such unbridled passion, and though "deriv'd from the passions" itself, it generates its own restraint, the restraint of delicacy. C.J. Rawson writes that in sentimental literature the "difficulty of reconciling delicacy, which restrains the feelings, with sensibility, which indulges them, is in fact only apparent. For it was possible to see the restraint itself as a feeling in its own right, and a 'sensibility'".¹ Delicacy as a part of sensibility is evident in the behaviour of Lady Helen, when Erskine has discovered her secret connection with Edward Nugent. He reports that:

¹"Some Remarks on Eighteenth-Century 'Delicacy', with a Note on Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy (1768)", JEGP 61 (1962), 3.

she leant with unconscious helplessness upon my shoulder. At length, as if sensible of an indignity her mind labour'd to repel, emotion a little subsided, and turning her face from me, she imperfectly articulated, "we are married!" . . . [This] shew'd me at a glance, all the delicacy of a heart, which in the extremest moment of perturbation, was alive to decorum (I, 145).

Such a sensibility, operating in favour of decorum even at moments when feeling overcomes reason, is necessary to the heroine, who is in the dangerous position of loving a man other than her husband. Lord Melross remarks that as he is "[u]naccustom'd, both by sex and situation to regulate my passions", it depends on Sophia to ensure the innocence of their relationship (II, 225). She does this because in a virtuous woman, though not in a man, sensibility and its regulator, delicacy, are inseparable.

Such a sensibility is no force of subversion, or of female liberation. It is clearly part of the ideology of womanhood which supported the double standard of sexual morality by exalting women's supposedly superior virtue. However, sensibility, even so defined, needs further control if the heroine is to be able to fulfil all a woman's duties. There are many remarks in The Errors of Innocence about the necessity of controlling sensibility by reason. Sophia is able to support her various trials because her sensibility is held in check. Edward Nugent calls her "one whose sensibility would long since have overwhelmed a weaker mind, and is only bounded by the excellence of her understanding" (V, 125). The hero tells her that "with the most perfect understanding, and the warmest feelings of your sex, [you] have made the one only an instrument to check and govern the other" (V, 216). Lady Helen informs her, "[your soul] is alive to the most poignant emotions; I should not love you, if it was not, nor esteem you if you did not know how to conquer them" (IV, 13). This imperative both to have sensibility and to control it ensures that the heroine's life is a continual internal struggle, and she

claims that to "correct a sensibility too turbulent for my repose, and to yield in silent humility to the dictates of Providence, has been the business of my life, and is its reward" (III, 247).

The Errors of Innocence makes a good illustration of R.O. Allen's argument that "[t]he heart of the Sentimental novel is an act of absolute submission. Sentimental novels not only focus on external persecutions . . . but on the inner struggles of the heroine who is required to break her will relentlessly".¹ Sophia's behaviour when tricked into marriage with Obrien is an example of the heroine's submission. "Half submission is the error of man, and his punishment. I will struggle to compleat mine," she tells Lady Helen (II, 35). Whether she ever submits so far as to consummate her marriage with Obrien is not made clear. There are hints that she does not. Early in the marriage she reports that "Obrien has had the generosity to suppress a love I cannot return, and leaves it to time to effect, what he thinks it possible time may" (II, 35). Later, Obrien demands, without success, "that tenderness from you, I have so long vainly solicited" (II, 239). The very female delicacy which usually implies submissiveness, in this case supports the freedom to resist. Sophia writes that she is trying to suppress her distaste for her husband, but "there are some efforts so repugnant to our nature, that we are almost tempted to abhor commendation for them" (II, 44).

The Errors of Innocence, then, is a very sentimental novel which is also strongly didactic. It makes a thorough study of the heroine's sensibility, and the conclusion as expressed in the

¹"If You Have Tears: Sentimentalism as Soft Romanticism", Genre 8 (1975), 134.

novel's "sentiments" is that a truly admirable feminine sensibility is almost synonymous with absolute submission. However, the heroine is left free to cherish her pure love for the hero, and, it is hinted, to resist the sexual advances of her husband. Like many sentimental novels, it offers in the working-out of the plot a licence which didactic statements throughout the work deny. Many of the opinions expressed are anti-feminist, yet as a study of feminine sensibility vindicated and finally rewarded, it offers wish-fulfilment to the eighteenth-century female reader.

This type of appeal is not the hallmark of Clara Reeve's The Two Mentors, which does not analyse feminine sensibility in any depth. It is a didactic tale "calculated to recommend and promote the social and domestic Virtues, by representing them as the only means of Happiness".¹ The hero, Edward Saville, has a guardian, who wants him to get to know the world by way of a course of debauchery, and sends him to stay in the house of the licentious Lady Bellmour in the hope that he will find a mistress there. His second mentor is a virtuous tutor, Mr. Johnson, who warns him against vice. Edward is pre-disposed to virtue anyway, so there is no real conflict for him even when he is locked up all night with Sukey Jones, whom he helps to restore to a virtuous life. He meets and falls in love with Sophia Melcombe, whose history is revealed to him through the memoirs of the Bennet family. The child of Lord D--'s first brief, unacknowledged marriage, she is brought up by the Bennets. She was to have married young Valentine Bennet, but he died. After an unconvincing abduction by Lord S--, from whom she is rescued by Saville, Sophia agrees to marry the hero, and does so once she

¹The Two Mentors: A Modern Story (London: Charles Dilly, 1783), Advertisement, I, n. pag.

has been acknowledged by her father. The strong influence, for good or bad, of women on men is frequently emphasized. Saville's tutor tells him "an early attachment to a virtuous and amiable woman cultivates and ripens every great and noble quality; an attachment to a bad woman leads to a life of folly, vice, and misery" (The Two Mentors, I, 169). After the opening sequence the story moves away from the theme of the hero's two mentors, but it is heavily didactic throughout. As the Monthly reviewer commented, if "strict morality can recommend a work, the present hath a claim to public attention".¹

As well as preaching strict morality, The Two Mentors shows the emotionalism of late eighteenth-century works of sentiment. Acts of benevolence provide the opportunity for extravagant displays of sensibility. When Saville helps Sukey Jones to escape from Lady Bellmour's, her gratitude is expressed in sentimental fashion. Saville reports: "she kneeled down, she embraced my knees, she lifted up her clasped hands to heaven, and looked a blessing upon me, but she could not articulate a word" (I, 130). Sophia's eventual reconciliation with her father occurs in a highly sentimental scene, described by the heroine:

At last I threw myself at his feet, embraced his knees, besought his forgiveness, and his fatherly advice and protection. While I was in this attitude, the door opened, and in rushed Lord B-- [her half-brother]. . . . The youth threw himself down, and kneeled beside me. We both wept, and looked with supplicating eyes up to my Lord D--. He looked at us till his heart relented; his lips quivered; his eyes overflowed. -- There is no bearing this! said he; . . . can I spurn my kneeling children? . . . I sobbed, and fainted away (II, 221-2).

Such extravagant gestures are considered the appropriate expression of filial feelings in late eighteenth-century novels, and a "popular hero is as often on his knees to his parents as to

¹Monthly Review 68 (1783), 539.

his beloved".¹ The stress on filial submission is particularly strong in the novels of Clara Reeve, who claims in her critical writing that "I shall neither applaud, nor recommend any [novels] that have a tendency to weaken the respect due to parents; for upon that depends . . . the education of youth, their introduction into life, and indeed all the social and domestic virtues" (The Progress of Romance, II, 11). Accordingly, relationships between parents and children are the most important emotionally in The Two Mentors.

Romantic love does not play so important a part in this novel as in The Errors of Innocence. The love-story is lukewarm. Saville gives way to some expressions of rapture when he first meets Sophia Melcombe, and writes to his tutor, "she inspires respect and awe; a savage could not offer rudeness to her; the form of a Venus, with the chastity of Diana. I have not words to express her charms" (The Two Mentors, I, 139). Their courtship, however, is characterized by strict propriety rather than by romantic raptures and distresses. Although Sophia is credited with "great sensibility of heart" (II, 24), she is far too proper to allow this to appear in front of the hero, nor does she reveal it in letters to a female correspondent. Reeve makes the heroine's sensibility of lesser importance in this novel because of her intention to reduce the romantic theme to a quiet, proper prelude to a life of domestic virtue. When he and Sophia are betrothed, Saville complains that she "keeps me at the greatest distance, and is offended if I use the least degree of familiarity. I am mortified, and sometimes distressed, at her behaviour" (II, 264). His friend Selby reproves him, pointing out that "Sophia acknowledges you to her father as a favoured lover; she avows her regard for you; she consents to go with

¹Tompkins, p. 87.

you to the altar. What more would you have? Her behaviour is exactly what it ought to be" (II, 267). It is filial, not romantic love, which Reeve treats in the manner typical of sentimental novels, and Sophia's father arouses more sensibility in her than either of her two lovers do.

Sophia has good reason for her reserved behaviour in Reeve's moral world. When defending her coolness to Saville, Selby points out that she is to be his wife, not his mistress, and therefore has to keep him at a certain distance to compel his respect. This implies that a woman who fails in any degree of decorum is in danger of being relegated from her status as respectable woman, a point also made by the heroine when she remarks that "[w]hen a woman has thrown off virtue and shame, she is capable of any bad action: how cautious then ought we to be of every step that leads to these boundaries!" (II, 252). Female modesty must be strictly preserved to avoid loss of chastity, as Sukey's story demonstrates. Once Lady Bellmour had "laughed [her] out of that natural reserve which is given by Heaven to be the guard of female virtue", ruin quickly followed (I, 43). Despite her loss of virtue Sukey never throws off shame, so she is able to return to a virtuous life. Retiring modesty, if not strict seclusion, is necessary for a girl who wishes to avoid Sukey's errors. Dancing is dangerous, and Miss Freewill, who dances well, is criticized because "she must have lost the first blush of virgin modesty, before she could exhibit her person to the utmost advantage" (I, 92). Warnings about the pernicious influence of London are frequent. "Oh let not the chaste, the delicate virgin, set her foot there!" warns Mr. Johnson, "lest she imbibe the spirit of that soil" (II, 204).

The villainous Lady Bellmour, who entices girls to become mistresses to men of high rank, is a warning of the evil women

are capable of when not bounded by the strict rules Clara Reeve advocates. She is presented as an example of modern depravity, caused partly by the influx of French customs into England. She rejoices that "the delicacy and refinement of the continent" is entering English manners, and hopes that her name will "descend to posterity, as one of those women of spirit, who . . . [helped] to emancipate the youth of both sexes from the ignorance and prejudices of Gothic times and manners" (I, 22-3). Another libertine woman, Mrs. Crosby, completes the identification of a spirit of freedom in women with immorality. She is, as Saville sarcastically remarks, "a woman of fashion in every sense of the word. She is lately separated from her husband; for what woman of taste and spirit can bear the insupportable fatigues and restraints of conjugal duties and employments, to which her cruel husband would have confined her?" The way she has taken to "recover her liberty" is, of course, to become another man's mistress (I, 32). Such examples of immorality are used as demonstrations of the need for young women to be kept uncontaminated by knowledge of the world, secluded in the country "where they may breathe the purer air of virtue and simplicity" (II, 204). The standard of virtue in The Two Mentors is similar to that of The Errors of Innocence, but, without the melioration provided by that novel's glorification of the heroine's sensibility. The Two Mentors advocates for women a carefully guarded innocence that precludes any suggestion of sexuality, and shows that while sensibility can be a trap to women, a didactic novel which makes no concession to feminine sensibility can be even more repressive.

On the other hand, the restrictive morality which Reeve applies to young virgins does not prevent her from glorifying woman in another of her roles. The virtuous wife and mother,

Mrs. Bennet, is given homage in the most unreserved sentimental tradition. The hero is almost as much impressed with her as he is with her foster-daughter Sophia. He describes her as an "agreeable woman, whose conversation is seasoned with wit, and bounded by modesty . . . an angelic creature" (I, 144), and adds "I compared Mrs. Bennet with Lady Bellmour; I looked on one with respect even to reverence, on the other with mingled indignation and contempt" (I, 145). Mrs. Bennet earns reverence by her domestic economy, her charity, and her modesty, but above all by her maternal qualities. When Sophia's mother dies in giving birth to her at the Bennets' house, Mrs. Bennet disappears and her husband eventually finds her, as he reports:

giving her own breast to the poor little orphan child; while the tears rolled down her cheeks in compassion for it. I kneeled involuntarily to her as to a superiour being. Oh Maria! -- my angel wife! This action is worthy of thee, and few beside thee would have performed it (I, 277).

The feminine superiority which the heroine of Errors of Innocence possesses because of her delicate sensibility is granted to Mrs. Bennet because of her maternal instinct. Her virtue is further proved by her refusal to recognize this superiority, and her reply to her husband's extravagant worship is typically modest and self-effacing. "My love, said she, forgive my doing it without first asking you" (I, 277). As so often in sentimental novels, female superiority is maintained by female humility.

In The School for Widows, another heavily didactic novel, Reeve makes a further examination into women's roles and duties. In this novel, with its denunciation of false sensibility and its definition of true sensibility as "modest and secret . . . [avoiding] all ostentatious display of it's feelings" (The School for Widows, Preface, I, viii), there are fewer demonstrations of emotion than in The Two Mentors. The novel presents a portrait

of women's moral dignity which often suggests a feminist argument. The novel centres on the experience of two women, Mrs. Strictland and Mrs. Darnford, old friends who write accounts of their married lives to each other. Both have suffered because of their husbands. Mr. Darnford was a weak man who gambled away his fortune, while Mr. Strictland was parsimonious and authoritarian. After being an exemplary wife Mrs. Darnford spends her widowhood helping other women, especially Donna Isabella, who has lost her reason after being forced into a marriage which turns out to be faked. The moral drawn from the various stories is that women must be virtuous and submissive, yet the implication is always that they are superior to men. The ambiguity of the novel's message is highlighted in the different reactions of the Monthly and Critical reviewers to it. Both find fault with the title. The Critical, noting the novel's strict view of a woman's duty to her husband, remarks that "this work is in reality the School for Wives".¹ The Monthly, irritated by the presentation of women as morally superior, comments that the novel is "rather a School for Husbands; those introduced being represented as very naughty boys indeed, while their spouses, both as wives and widows, are strained up to the best of female characters".²

The novel is a school for wives insofar as it teaches that the best way to manage a difficult husband is by prudent submission. Mrs. Strictland's husband is particularly domineering. Although he is rich and she has brought him a fortune, he will not let her keep a carriage or have a servant to wait on her. He does not like her to visit or receive visits from anyone, and he prevents her from corresponding with her friends. It is emphasized that Mrs. Strictland does not wish to

¹Critical Review 2nd ser. 2 (1791), 477.

²Monthly Review 2nd ser. 5 (1791), 466.

govern her husband. "I wished for nothing more than a kind and gentle master," she tells Mrs. Darnford (II, 137). The house-keeper, Mrs. Gilson, gives the young wife "kind and prudent counsels", always counsels of submission. "She said, that, by striving against the stream, I encreased my own distress; that, if I would submit to my fate . . . I might, in time, soften the harshness of his temper" (II, 140). At first Mrs. Strictland finds this advice too difficult to follow. She argues with her husband, cries, and accuses him of despotism. When a violent quarrel between them results in a miscarriage, Mrs. Gilson persuades her to realise that she has increased her own sufferings by passion and resentment. The manipulative nature of the wifely submission Mrs. Gilson advocates is made clear when after the miscarriage she proposes articles of reconciliation with Mr. Strictland, which restore to his wife the privileges he has denied her. These he accepts, being temporarily chastened by his wife's suffering and humility.

Mr. Darnford also makes a difficult husband. He becomes immersed in the dissipations of London and loses money gaming. Mrs. Darnford, much more intelligent and prudent than her husband, channels all her energies into her wifely duties, for "he was my husband, and I resolved to do everything in my power to serve and save him" (I, 75). The limits of a wife's obedience are set by the even more important duty of female purity. She will not accept presents from Lord A--, who clearly has designs on her, despite her husband's insistence. She tells him, "I do not think myself bound to obey all your commands. You have power to ruin my fortune, and to destroy my peace; but my principles you shall never destroy" (I, 103). When her husband wants to retrieve their fortune by selling her to Lord A--, she tells him that the infamous proposal "has cancelled all ties between us,

and made an eternal separation" (I, 229). Mrs. Darnford's story demonstrates how a female character, while keeping to the strictest eighteenth-century code of female conduct, can be given a dignity which sets her far above her husband.

Many of the novel's incidents and descriptions reveal a feminist consciousness at work. Mrs. Strictland writes that her baby daughter "was most welcome to me; but her father set little value upon her. He was one of those wise men who thought women a drug, and that they were hardly worth rearing" (II, 184-5). Women, in his opinion, "were not to be trusted with power, nor with money: for the latter they had no occasion; having meat, drink, and lodgings, provided for them" (II, 286). Mr. Darnford, a much weaker husband than Mr. Strictland, is contemplated with less anger and more amusement. His wife describes one of his comically inadequate attempts to exert his authority:

"I am your husband, and your master, and you shall live with me, and you shall do as I please, and go where I please. So it don't signify talking any more; for I am tired and sleepy, and -- and -- " he gaped, and nodded, and fell back in his chair (I, 222).

The stories of these two marriages demonstrate that men are tyrants, arousing in their wives either resentment or slightly amused pity, depending on the husband's strength or weakness. The wife's duty is to submit as cheerfully as possible and make the best of her life, and the reward comes when she is "restored to [her] liberty by the death of [her] husband" (I, 12).

Freedom so gained can only be enjoyed if the wife's affection for her husband is strictly limited. The sobering accounts of married life in The School for Widows are a warning against the dangers of romantic love of the kind favoured in The Errors of Innocence. Female sensibility, the novel implies, is dangerous because it makes women emotionally dependent on men.

Mrs. Strictland carries out her duties as a wife, but as a widow she can remark tranquilly that her husband's death was "an awful and important event, but not greatly deplored by me" (I, 12). Under the terms of her husband's will, she loses not only her money but the guardianship of her children if she remarries, a restriction on her freedom which she calls "generous, just and prudent" (II, 290). While the only freedom that a novel like The Errors of Innocence wholeheartedly advocates for its heroine is the freedom to love the hero, freedom to love is the one freedom which Reeve does not want to offer women. Her heroines are far too prudent to want such freedom. Mrs. Strictland tells her suitor James Balderson that even if her husband's will were not so restrictive, "I had resolved, for reasons respecting myself, never to marry again" (III, 243). P.M. Spacks writes that most women writers of the eighteenth century associate female sexuality directly with vulnerability,¹ and Clara Reeve exemplifies this in her rejection of sexual feeling as a motivation for her women. In Reeve's view, independence and fortitude are good for women, but romantic love is not.

The potential tyranny of romantic love is further revealed in the story of Donna Isabella, whom Mrs. Darnford goes to nurse at the request of Captain Maurice. Donna Isabella is first made vulnerable by her passion for her husband Antonio, and when he dies she is inconsolable. Captain Maurice, who, unknown to her, caused her husband's death, is in love with her. He tells Mrs. Darnford of his unceasing attempts to persuade her to marry him. Her disapproval shows her awareness of the tyranny hidden in the lover's posture of adoration:

¹Spacks, Imagining a Self, p. 90.

"And had you no pity for her?" said I.
 "Yes; I more than pitied -- I adored her."
 "That was not the kind of pity she wanted."
 "My passion grew by opposition. I suffered as much as she did. I have kneeled, and prayed, and wept; but in vain."
 "Poor lady!" said I, "what she must have suffered!"
 (III, 120-1).

Maurice tells Mrs. Darnford that he had eventually forced Donna Isabella to go through a ceremony which she believed to be a valid marriage. She became distracted, and refused to see him. He employs Mrs. Darnford to look after her, and Mrs. Darnford not only restores her reason by gentle treatment, she tells her "the welcome secret, that she was not married at all", and restores her liberty (III, 205). Reeve uses this episode to illustrate the destructiveness of men's passions, and the contrasting helpfulness of women's affection for each other.

The most powerful emotion in The School for Widows, in fact, is women's love for each other. The worst hardship of Mrs. Strictland's marriage is her husband's refusal to let her continue her friendship with Mrs. Darnford. After his death, she writes rapturously to her old friend, "at length, Heaven allows us to be united" (I, 12). The two heroines find their happiness in each other's friendship, and in the friendship of other women such as Donna Isabella, and Mrs. Martin, another widow who with Mrs. Darnford's help sets up a school for girls. The emphasis on female friendship in this novel makes another contrast with The Errors of Innocence. In the latter, sentimental friendship between the heroine and her female confidant is important, but once love for a man intervenes, female friendship is a weaker tie. At one point, Lady Helen is unhappy with her husband, and suggests to Sophia that they "forswear the pernicious sex; and devote ourselves henceforth, to the simple and true pleasures, on which we once founded our

happiness." Immediately, she retracts the offer. "Vain, and absurd idea; the heart once expanded, can never contract. Those amiable trifles, which constituted its felicity, become indeed mere trifles, and leave us only the bitter consciousness, that they once made us happy, without the possibility of their ever doing so again" (II, 229). In The School for Widows, on the other hand, marriage is merely a probation to be endured until widowhood enables the heroines to enjoy the delights of true love, only to be found in female friendship.

The School for Widows, in fact, portrays an alternative society in which female friendship is all-important. Mrs. Strictland's search for her old friend takes her to the town of W--, where Mrs. Darnford has been a boarder. There, she becomes friendly with Mrs. Martin and with Mrs. Bailey, the landlady of the White Hart, and hears from them the story of Mrs. Darnford's goodness. In one of her letters to Mrs. Darnford, Mrs. Strictland describes an all-female gathering at the White Hart, at which the women celebrate female virtue:

Suppose me sitting at a table, with Mrs. Bailey on one side, and Mrs. Martin on the other -- Mary Martin opposite -- listening to the praises of Mrs. Darnford from all of them, and gaining little circumstances of her life and character that delight my very soul (I, 36).

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The story of Mrs. Darnford's life at Mrs. Martin's suggests that Reeve is interested in forming an economic as well as a sentimental alliance of women. She builds up a self-sufficient female community, based on the girls' school and a haberdashery business. In her parting advice to Mrs. Martin she stresses that the school should be kept an all-female concern. Mrs. Martin's son is to be given financial help but expected to set up his own business, and the daughters are to forfeit their share of the business if they marry. The sympathetic men in the novel

are those who are prepared for women to be independent of them. Mr. M--, a father-figure to Mrs. Darnford during her marriage, encourages her spirit of independence. James Balderson, who proposes to Mrs. Strictland, is "truly venerable" (III, 257), but he is rejected, and the two heroines and Donna Isabella remain free and together at the end of the novel.

The female society portrayed in the novel is not open to all women. Mrs. Jones, the unsisterly sister of Mrs. Darnford, is excluded, as are the fashionable wife and daughters of the rector at W--. When Mrs. Martin first advertises for lodgers, she insists, despite her friends' mockery, on stipulating that only "Ladies of good Character" need apply (I, 21). Similarly, Reeve sets up in this novel what amounts to a separate society for women, but it is for ladies of good character only. Mrs. Gilson first tutors Mrs. Strictland in a woman's duty, and even in widowhood she feels the need for similar feminine tuition. She writes to Mrs. Darnford:

Though entirely my own mistress, I am not without fears of my conduct . . . I want a friend, who will neither flatter nor despise me; who will cherish my virtues, and assist me to correct my faults (I, 57).

The possibility of deviating from the strict path of virtue always remains, and a female friend is necessary to guard against this, as it is men who flatter and despise. The School for Widows shows women living independently of men, but the aim of this female society is to reinforce the very standards of female virtue which were used to oppress women. It is one late eighteenth-century demonstration of women's internalization of a concept of female virtue developed in the interests of a male-dominated society, and is evidence of women writers' ability to use this concept paradoxically as a source of independence and strength.

The relationship between didacticism, sentimentalism and feminism in the late eighteenth century is never simple. The domestic novels of Harriet Lee and Clara Reeve indicate some of the answers women novelists gave to the questions posed by eighteenth-century views of feminine sensibility and female duty. In The Errors of Innocence, the dangers of feminine sensibility are perceived, but sensibility is presented as fatal and inescapable. The tragedy which would be the logical outcome of such a view is averted through familiar plot devices which remove the obstacles to the heroine's love. In The Two Mentors, the feminine sensibility idealized in The Errors of Innocence is given much less importance, but women are equally idealized as moral guides and especially as mothers. The School for Widows also suppresses feminine sensibility insofar as it implies sexuality, and advocates a female alliance, feminist in many of its implications, but supporting many of the most restrictive aspects of the eighteenth-century view of women's duty. In their different ways all three novels support conventional eighteenth-century morality while offering revisions of the subordinate position allotted women, revision based on an exalted feminine sensibility or on the rejection of sensibility in favour of sober self-reliance. Their appeal for the eighteenth-century female reader is based on a concept of female virtue rewarded which Spacks finds in all eighteenth-century women's novels, in which "someone always appreciates the heroine".¹ This appreciation of female goodness is found in works of greater and lesser sentimentality, and is a link between the hints of feminism and the reinforcement of traditional morality found in the novels of Lee and Reeve.

¹Spacks, Imagining a Self, p. 58.

PART THREE: WOMEN NOVELISTS OF THE 1790s.

CHAPTER 8

THE FEMININE IDEAL IN NOVELS OF THE 1790s -- AN INTRODUCTION

Between the 1740s and the 1780s the sentimental heroine develops as an image of female virtue, particularly prevalent in the work of women novelists. Despite criticisms and burlesques of her, often produced by the women novelists themselves, she represents widespread late-eighteenth-century beliefs about essential, and ideal, female qualities. This sentimental heroine is likely to be modified as ideas about women or about sentimentalism change, and this is what happens towards the end of the century.

In the Gothic novel, which is extremely popular in the 1790s,¹ the sentimental heroine becomes the Gothic heroine. The same attributes of delicacy, intelligence, and sensibility belong to her as to the sentimental heroine, and the difference between them is created by the atmosphere of terror in which the Gothic heroine moves, and the increasing darkness and mysteriousness of the trials which her sensibility is forced to undergo. Sophia Lee's pseudo-historical novel, The Recess, is an early and influential example of the use of Gothic conventions in a sentimental novel. In the 1790s, Ann Radcliffe, and many lesser-known writers such as Regina Maria Roche and Eliza Parsons, wrote sentimental Gothic novels with heroines of sensibility.² The Gothic novel of the 1790s, as written by a number of women, can be seen as the sentimental novel

¹See R.D. Mayo, "How Long was Gothic Fiction in Vogue?" MLN 58 (1943), 58-64, on the growing popularity of Gothic after 1791; and The English Novel in the Magazines, p. 349, for his estimate that a third of fiction in volume form published in the years 1796-1806 was Gothic.

²For a discussion of Regina Maria Roche and Eliza Parsons see Dorothy Blakey, The Minerva Press 1790-1820 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 57-60.

intensified. The same ideal of womanhood is portrayed, but the threats to sentimental virtue are more disturbing, and the examination of the emotions of the heroine is more thorough.

The Gothic heroine can be seen as a sentimental heroine with heightened emotional experiences. At the same time, however, as this development of interest in the heroine's emotional life, there is a revolt by many novelists against what is seen as the excessive subjectivity, emotionalism, and unreality of sentimental writing. Many novelists of the 1790s, in various ways, lay claim to a return to the real world in their fiction.

It is on these novelists, rather than the Gothic writers, that I intend to concentrate. Jane West refuses to use Gothic conventions, finding depiction of everyday life the only morally justifiable kind of fiction. Mary Wollstonecraft uses the Gothic theme of imprisonment, but is primarily concerned with the realities of her own time and place. Charlotte Smith includes some Gothic effects in her novels, but does not make them her central concern. These writers have been chosen because in them we can see some of the changes made in the accepted ideal of womanhood in the 1790s. The Gothic novel shows us the intensification of the sentimental ideal of womanhood; but outside the Gothic tradition we can examine the reaction against sentimentalism, which led in some cases to the rejection of the sentimental ideal, and in others to the creation of new ideals of womanhood.

Distrust of sentimentalism spreads in the 1790s, and is even apparent in the Gothic novel. Coral Howells comments on "a profound unease and fear of anarchy which runs side by side with expressions of frustration at conventional restraints throughout Gothic fiction". Gothic novelists "feared the personal and social consequences of any release of passion or instinctual

drives",¹ and therefore, despite their concern with emotion and fantasy, they convey the fear of the irrational which is seen more explicitly in the anti-sentimental novels flourishing alongside them.

The major novelists writing in the 1790s show some evidence of a reaction against sentimentalism, and express distrust of the sentimentalist's faith in feeling as a guide to conduct. Jane Austen ridicules what she perceives as the fundamental selfishness of sentimentalism in the juvenilia produced in this decade. Distrust of the heroine's subjective responses is a feature of Camilla, in which Fanny Burney severely disciplines her heroine for mistakes which one reviewer considered "not errors in one who is almost a child".² Ann Radcliffe, while exploiting the Gothic novel's possibilities for exploring women's fears and fantasies, is careful to provide a rational framework for her tales, and argues that control of the feelings is necessary.³ Maria Edgeworth, in Letters of Julia and Caroline (1795), supports the claims of sense over sensibility.

The widespread distrust of sensibility means that in the novels of the 1790s, the ideal sentimental heroine is modified or rejected. How the heroine is portrayed in a particular novel, however, depends to a large extent on the political persuasions of the novelist, for in the 1790s, the changes in the novelists' conventions of ideal womanhood are directly connected with

¹Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction (University of London: Athlone Press, 1978), p. 6.

²Critical Review 2nd ser. 18 (1796), 40 Cf. Margaret Doody's view that Camilla is a "gigantic defence" of the heroine against the world. See "Deserts, Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel", Genre 10 (1977), 551.

³See Howells, p. 47, and Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 30-1.

contemporary political debates. Political ideas are aired in novels before this time, but in the 1790s, a decade of great disturbance in British society, the political debate enters fiction with a new intensity. The ideas of radical reformers like Paine are praised or scorned in novels. Claims on behalf of the common man give rise to complaints about the moral decline of the lower orders, which are expressed by many novelists. The French Revolution enters many novels, to be praised or reviled according to the writer's politics. The new feminism of Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman is debated in novels.

The typical novel of the 1790s, then, is a novel with a purpose. Critics complain that "[n]ovels preach as well as sermons", and that "philosophers, in order to obtain for their dogmata a more ready reception, have often judged it expedient to introduce them to the world in the captivating dress of fable".¹ The "philosophers" make no secret of the political motivation of their writing, believing with the radical Analytical Review that the novel is an "obvious and popular method of influencing the sentiments and opinions of the rising generation, by whom reform, whether moral or political, must be effected".² Conservative writers are equally clear. Jane West describes one of her novels as "a well-meant endeavour to point out the tendency of several opinions [i.e. radical political ideas] now too generally diffused through every rank in society".³ Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, the novel tends towards didacticism, its claim to teach as well as entertain being its passport

¹Review of Holcroft's Hugh Trevor, Critical Review 2nd ser. 13 (1795), 139; and review of Godwin's Caleb Williams, Monthly Review 2nd ser. 15 (1794), 145.

²Analytical Review 25 (1797), 25.

³A Tale of the Times (London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), II, 80.

to respectability. In the 1790s, when novelists take sides in a fierce political debate, the didactic becomes the polemical.

The novelists on both sides of the debate can be briefly characterized. Writers belonging to the group labelled by their enemies "English Jacobins", and others sympathetic to liberal ideas, write novels portraying the individual as naturally good and society as corrupt. Because they consider character to be formed by circumstance, they tend to undermine conventional notions of guilt and moral responsibility. Their villains are rich men and aristocrats abusing their power in society, and their heroes and heroines are often people of humble origin and bold ideas. Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, and Mary Hays are strong supporters of the "new philosophy", while Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Mary Robinson are among the novelists who expressed some approval of radical ideas in their fiction. Towards the end of the decade, a number of self-consciously anti-Jacobin writers combat the philosophy of these novelists. They recommend traditional Christian morality, emphasizing the concept of original sin, and support the hierarchical structure of existing society. Jane West, Elizabeth Hamilton, Robert Bisset, and George Lucas are conservative writers. Their typical technique is to ridicule the "new philosophers" and their novels by parody.

Some sentimentalism persists on both sides. Sophia King, in Waldorf: or the Dangers of Philosophy (1798), denounces radical ideas in a melodramatic tale told in an emotional style. Mary Robinson supports liberal ideas in highly sentimental novels like The Widow (1794), and Walsingham (1798). On the whole, however, reaction against sentimentalism is widespread. The heroine is often the focus for the discussion of sensibility. In Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800), Eliza Hamilton presents

a comic anti-heroine, Bridgetina Botherim, an unattractive "modern philosopher" who pursues the unwilling hero with great gusto, and is given to exclamations like "Sensations! emotions! delicacies! sensibilities! O how shall ye overwhelm us in one great torrent of felicity!"¹ The tragic consequences of such delight in sensibility are seen in the fate of Bridgetina's friend Julia. In her character "[s]entiment usurped the place of judgment, and the mind, instead of deducing inferences from facts, was now solely occupied in the invention of extravagant and chimerical situations" (Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, I, 147). Julia's seduction and early death are the results of choosing sentiment before reason. Bridgetina is a comic exposé of Mary Hays's radical heroine, Emma Courtney, who also pursues the hero with declarations of love. Hamilton's footnotes (for example, at II, 85 and II, 221) point out the ideas taken from Hays's novel. However, Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796) is not the paean to sensibility that Hamilton implies it is. To Hays, Emma's sensibility is the result of the perverted education which renders women "refined, romantic, factitious, unfortunate, beings".² The advice the heroine gives to her adopted son at the end of the novel would be a fitting conclusion to many 1790s novels, whether written by an anti-Jacobin or a radical. She hopes to see him "escaped from the tyranny of the passions, restored to reason, to the vigor of his mind, to self controul, to the dignity of active, intrepid, virtue!" (Emma Courtney, II, 220).

Both radical and anti-Jacobin writers criticize sensibility, then, but the emphasis of their attack is conditioned by their

¹Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (Bath: R. Cruttwell for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1800), II, 222.

²Memoirs of Emma Courtney (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), II, 109.

political stance. Hamilton's satire on Emma Courtney demonstrates the typical anti-Jacobin tactic of presenting the radical writers as worshippers of sensibility, seen as synonymous with sexual licence. Young girls in a number of novels are corrupted by Godwin's attack on marriage in Political Justice (1793), and by Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman. Eliza in Bisset's Douglas; or the Highlander (1800), like Julia in Eliza Hamilton's novel, is a seduced victim. Mary in George Walker's The Vagabond (1799), is a villainess who quotes Wollstonecraft and commits adultery.¹ In these novels the ideal heroine, a model for young women's conduct, is largely replaced by the ridiculous or erring female character, who functions as a warning to young women of dangerous behaviour. This does not mean the anti-Jacobin writers reject all aspects of the eighteenth-century feminine ideal. Instead they modify the ideal to exclude delicate sensibilities and to emphasize devotion to duty. They often include female characters who represent their version of ideal womanhood, but their emphasis is on exposing errors, not idealizing virtue.

Radical writers also react against sensibility, which in their interpretation leads not to sexual licence but to passivity and submissiveness. Robert Bage and Thomas Holcroft criticize the sentimental heroine and offer lively, strong women as alternative models. Maria Fluart in Bage's Hermsprong (1796) is typical. Witty, irreverent and bold, she is not afraid to produce a pistol in emergencies.² The heroine of Holcroft's Anna St. Ives (1792) proclaims her belief in the equality of the sexes and the ability of right reason to create a just and equal

¹See Douglas; or the Highlander (London: Anti-Jacobin Press, 1800), III, 86-88; and The Vagabond (London: G. Walker and Hurst, 1799), I, 177-184.

²See Hermsprong (London: Folio Society, 1960), p. 226.

society. Bage's and Holcroft's praise of emancipated women suggests the beginnings of a new ideal of womanhood among radical novelists. However, women novelists of radical ideas usually portray, not emancipated women, but heroines who are victims of society's prejudices or their own feminine sensibility.

Inchbald, in A Simple Story (1791), and Hays, in Emma Courtney, describe the fate of women without the ability to control their passions. In The Victim of Prejudice (1799), Hays portrays an illegitimate heroine who, despite exemplary rational control of her feelings, is doomed to failure because of the prejudices of society.

The various changes in novelists' attitudes to the feminine ideal in the last decade of the century owe a great deal to the new feminist ideas of the time, and to the conservative reaction to these ideas. This argument is closely connected with the revolutionary debate which divided novels into "Jacobin" and "anti-Jacobin". To understand changes in the novels, it is useful to explore the relationship between feminist and radical ideas in the 1790s. To understand the peculiar tone of the women's feminist novels, which have as much in common with the established tradition of didactic novels by women as with the works of Bage and Holcroft, it is instructive to examine the connections between Wollstonecraft's influential feminist ideas, and the ideas of conservative moralists.

In the 1790s feminist ideas are identified, for the first time, with the radical side in politics. Catherine Macaulay, well-known for her liberal tendencies, uses Lockean ideas to argue for equal treatment of boys and girls. Because "the doctrine of innate ideas, and innate affections, are in a great measure exploded by the learned", she contends that it is only due to prejudice that the "notion of a sexual difference in the

human character" still prevails.¹ Macaulay's work is an influence on Wollstonecraft, who in Rights of Woman supports the French Revolution, and advocates reform in Britain. She laments "the wretchedness that has flowed from hereditary honours, riches, and monarchy", and predicts that "the more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society" (Vindication of the Rights of Woman, p. 93 and p. 96). Her belief is that revolutionary arguments should be extended to women. "If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of woman, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test" (Dedication to the Vindication, p. 87).

After Wollstonecraft, many 1790s writers argue for the rights of woman. Anne Frances Randall proclaims herself a follower of Wollstonecraft and writes that a "legion of Wollstonecrafts" is necessary to challenge male authority.² However, most feminists at the end of the decade are careful to disclaim too close a connection with Wollstonecraft and revolution. Mary Anne Radcliffe's Female Advocate (1799) and Priscilla Wakefield's Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex (1798) dissociate themselves from radical ideas. "The word reform, has become the signal of a party, and the fear of change may render some averse from the very idea of introducing an alteration in female manners: But . . . it is not a novelty that is proposed", writes Wakefield.³ Mary Anne Radcliffe writes that she wants protection, not power, for women.⁴

¹Letters on Education, (London: C. Dilly, 1790), Letter XXII, pp. 203-4.

²A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination, (London: T. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), p. 2.

³Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, (London: J. Johnson; and Darton and Harvey, 1798), p. 74.

⁴The Female Advocate, p. xi.

Even Mary Hays, notorious as Wollstonecraft's disciple, is cautious in her Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798), recommending "doing that by gentle means and by degrees, which can never be done well by any other".¹

These writers are trying to minimise the connection between feminism and revolution because of the strong reaction to radical ideas at the end of the decade. Britain had been at war with France since 1793 and in the literary world the British Critic and the Anti-Jacobin Review were setting a tone of dislike of the French and reaction against modern philosophy. Wollstonecraft and her Rights of Woman had fixed feminism and revolution together in the public mind, and conservative writers condemned both.

In her Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799) Hannah More condemns feminism as an example of a modern attempt to subvert God-given order. She writes:

among the innovations of this innovating period, the imposing term of rights has been produced to sanctify the claims of our female pretenders . . . with a view to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world.²

In More's view, the proper female role is to use moral influence to save Britain from revolution:

In this moment of alarm and peril . . . I would call on [women] to come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country. . . . I would call them to the best and most appropriate exertion of their power -- to raise the depressed tone of public morals, and to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principle (p. 3).

In An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797) Thomas Gisborne, like Hannah More, rejects the rights of woman together

¹Quoted from a review of the work in the Analytical Review (July, 1798), reprinted in Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (1974; rpt. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1977), p. 342.

²Strictures on Female Education, Vol. V of The Works of Hannah More (London: T. Cadell, 1830), p. 230.

with the rights of man, and concentrates on describing women's duties. Both writers emphasize female influence on men's morals and conduct, and urge that this influence should be used in the interests of stricter morality and greater respect for the Christian religion.

Basing their arguments on religion, More and Gisborne argue in favour of subordination in society and in marriage. More contends that "the inequality of human conditions" is not a just cause for complaint but is a "dispensation of God" (p. 89). Gisborne uses Biblical arguments to justify the subjection of a wife to her husband. This is, he writes, "a point not left among Christians to be decided by speculative arguments".¹ Obedience is enjoined to women by God and by Paul, and is only limited when a husband's commands clash with the commands of God. An important element in More's argument is her emphasis on original sin. In her view, this concept needs to be stressed because it has been challenged by contemporary thinkers who argue that man is naturally good, or that he is born without either good or bad tendencies. More insists on the "natural corruption of the heart" (p. xv). It is, she writes, "a fundamental error . . . to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may, perhaps, want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions" (p. 44). Wollstonecraft's argument that women's mental inferiority is the product of inferior education is opposed by these moralists, who portray female inferiority as a natural phenomenon, part of the God-given order they are defending. Gisborne states that God has given reasoning power and mental stamina "to the female mind with a more sparing hand" than to the male, while women naturally excel in quickness,

¹An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, pp. 226-7.

vivacity, and the ability to make their families happy (p. 22).

Seen as part of the revolutionary debate of the 1790s, the sexual politics of a radical like Wollstonecraft and conservatives like More and Gisborne are completely opposed. However, the debate about women's position in society, though in this decade it became firmly linked to the debate over the French Revolution, did not begin with it. Conduct-books and novels had been discussing the question for many years, and while opinions differed about women's duties and their natural abilities, on one question writers were almost universal in their agreement. This is their criticism of women's education as a drive for frivolous accomplishments, with a grave deficiency in serious studies. Wollstonecraft and More both belong to this tradition, and they sound remarkably like each other when denouncing female education. Wollstonecraft would certainly have agreed with More's complaint of the "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" (p. ix). Wollstonecraft complains that the "love of pleasure, fostered by the whole tendency of their education, gives a trifling turn to the conduct of women in most circumstances; . . . they are ever anxious about secondary things; and on the watch for adventures instead of being occupied by duties" (Rights of Woman, p. 151). More makes a similar point when she recommends serious study because "it corrects that spirit of trifling which [a woman] naturally contracts from the frivolous turn of female conversation and the petty nature of female employments" (Strictures, p. 136).

More and Gisborne argue that women should be educated for eternal life. More complains: "Do we not educate [women] . . . for the world, and not for themselves? for show, and not for use? for time, and not for eternity?" (p. 46). Gisborne writes that

in "the instruction of persons whom we believe to be destined to survive the stroke of death . . . the main object to be pursued is to inspire them with such views . . . as are calculated to render that future and most important state of being, a period of blessedness" (Enquiry, p. 41). Wollstonecraft bases her argument for better female education on very similar religious grounds. She complains that "though moralists have agreed that the tenor of life seems to prove that man is prepared by various circumstances for a future state, they constantly concur in advising woman only to provide for the present" (Rights of Woman, p. 118). It is because of her emphasis on woman's immortal soul that Wollstonecraft is able to argue that she should not be educated merely for man's convenience.

One of Wollstonecraft's targets is Dr. Gregory, who in his Legacy To His Daughters (1774) advises women to deny or suppress natural inclinations in order to appear attractive to men. His recommendations to women not to dance with too much spirit in case men think them immodest, and to appear weak in order to excite men's protective instincts, are dismissed in Rights of Woman as the arts of the seraglio (p. 112). The recommendation of piety as a sexual attraction in Fordyce's Sermons To Young Women (1766) arouses Wollstonecraft's indignation. "Do religion and virtue offer no stronger motives, no brighter reward?" (Rights of Woman, p. 194). Hannah More would have heartily endorsed this sentiment. Gisborne also criticizes writers like Fordyce and Gregory for recommending dissimulation: "it has been recommended to women studiously to refrain from discovering to their partners in marriage the full extent of their abilities and attainments. . . . This is not discretion, but art" (Enquiry, p. 263). To those who argue that men dislike clever women, Gisborne replies: "Because a man is absurd, is a woman to be a hypocrite?" (p. 264).

More argues against cultivating virtues in order to be attractive to men, writing that such an education produces "soft and smiling hypocrites" (Strictures, p. 117). These attacks on hypocrisy show that conduct-book writers of the 1790s have adopted different attitudes from those of their predecessors, and the difference can be attributed to the later writers' Evangelical position. It was not only the feminists of the decade who were adopting new views of women's role. Evangelical Christianity also encouraged certain changes, and in attacking the assumption that women's main aim is to be sexually attractive, Evangelical moralists like Gisborne and More are close to Wollstonecraft.

Their works are also close to Rights of Woman in the criticisms they make of sensibility. Hannah More devotes a chapter of her Strictures to "the Danger of an Ill-directed Sensibility" (p. 283). In female education, she complains, "emotions are too early and too much excited, and tastes and feelings are considered as too exclusively making up the whole of the female character; in which the judgment is little exercised, the reasoning powers are seldom brought into action, and self-knowledge and self-denial scarcely included" (p. 288). This is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's complaint that women have an "over-exercised sensibility", and that "their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion and feeling, when they should reason" (Rights of Woman, p. 152).

Changes in ideals of womanhood in the 1790s, then, are due to a complex mixture of revolutionary feminist ideas, a widespread reaction against sensibility, and a new emphasis on the seriousness of female education shared by writers of various political views. In the novels of the decade these changes are reflected. Writers of widely differing views are concerned with revising the concept of ideal womanhood. The connection between

feminist and revolutionary ideas helps explain why the tradition of defending women by idealizing their influence in society is replaced, in the novels of Wollstonecraft and Hays, by a more radical reassessment of women's position. Again, the link between feminism and revolution helps us understand the strong reaction against new views of woman's role among conservative novelists. On the other hand, the similarities between writers like Wollstonecraft and More remind us that both are drawing on the same didactic tradition, as well as sharing certain attitudes typical of the end of the century. Their views on female virtue are not always so opposed to each other as might appear at first. All these considerations are important as we turn to examining in detail the work of three women novelists at the end of the eighteenth century.

Because there is, by this time, an established tradition that women novelists are centrally concerned with the idealized heroine, the revision of the concept of ideal femininity is particularly important, and particularly problematic, for them. Jane West puts forward a conservative view of woman's role. Mary Wollstonecraft writes her novels from the point of view of a radical and feminist. Charlotte Smith, an admirer of Wollstonecraft's work and a sympathizer with the ideals of the French Revolution, tries to alter the sentimental heroine without divorcing herself from the sentimental tradition. The work of these three writers illustrates the diversity of response to the special questions which the last decade of the century posed for the novelist.

CHAPTER 9

JANE WEST

In the late 1790s and early 1800s Jane West's reputation as defender of Church and State was high. Her friend Bishop Percy did all he could to publicize her works, and praised her in the British Critic as "a lover of order, subordination, and lawful authority".¹ She corresponded with Sarah Trimmer, and her Letters Addressed to a Young Man was considered a useful complement to the conduct books of Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More.² The Gentleman's Magazine printed poems by and to her, as well as letters about her, one of which praised her stand "against the prevailing torrent of licentious manners", and reported that the Queen was believed to have bought her novels.³ Through Bishop Percy, West became known to Robert Nares, co-founder of the British Critic, who praised her novel The Infidel Father (1802) as the third in a succession of anti-Jacobin works, the others being The Vagabond and Memoirs of Modern Philosophers. Nares' description of the novel, "written with a design to expose the false opinions of modern philosophers to detestation and contempt",⁴ can also be applied to West's earlier novels, The Advantages of Education, or, The History of Maria Williams (1793), A Gossip's Story (1796), and A Tale of the Times (1799). Her first novel has very little direct reference

¹British Critic 18 (1801), 527. For the attribution to Percy see the letter from Nares to Bishop Percy, Sept. 13, 1801, in Nichols' Illustrations, Vol. VII (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1848), 592.

²See British Critic 18 (1801), 287.

³Gentleman's Magazine 69 Part 2 (1799), 1128.

⁴British Critic 21 (1803), 411. For the attribution to Nares see Nares to Bishop Percy, April 23, 1803, in Nichols' Illustrations, Vol. VII, p. 601.

to modern philosophy, but her stated aim, "to secure happiness, by removing those capricious desires which undermine content", is anti-Jacobin.¹ All West's novels can be seen as an attack on "capricious desires". From the beginning of her career as a novelist, she was laying the basis for her later reputation as defender of the conservative view of religion, politics, and morals.

From this description it would seem unlikely that Mary Wollstonecraft would be among Jane West's admirers; but the only comment on West in Wollstonecraft's letters is favourable. Sending A Gossip's Story to Mary Hays for review early in 1797, she wrote, "[t]he great merit of this work is, in my opinion, the display of the small causes which destroy matrimonial felicity & peace".² The review which subsequently appeared in the Analytical Review echoes this description, and is on the whole favourable to the novel. West, "without attempting those higher investigations of principles and action which exercise the understanding, and stimulate it's dormant faculties, is yet entitled to praise", for her "simple, interesting, and well-written story".³ The reviewer describes with approval the aim of the work, to show "the unhappy consequences, which result from false views of life, in a mind, though amiable and ingenuous, yet destitute of vigour and stability; solicitous to excel, and desirous to be happy, but sinking under fancied evils, and

¹The Advantages of Education, or, The History of Maria Williams (London: William Lane at the Minerva Press, 1793), I, Preface, n. pag.

²Wollstonecraft to Mary Hays, January, 1797; in Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 375.

³Analytical Review 25 (1797), 25. The review, initialled "V.V.", is presumably by Mary Hays, though possibly Hays did not accept the commission and Wollstonecraft wrote the review herself. One sentence echoes Wollstonecraft's letter: "The principle, upon which her story chiefly turns, is that of displaying the small causes which too often destroy matrimonial felicity, and domestic peace" (25).

destroying it's own peace, by the very means which it takes to secure it". This passage is a close rendering of West's description of Marianne, the foolish one of her pair of contrasted sister-heroines.¹

The reviewer's comments and the remark in Wollstonecraft's letter indicate some areas of agreement in the 1790s between feminists and the more conservatively-inclined women novelists. Both are critical of the sentimental heroine and offer alternatives to the romantic novel's view of life. Jane West makes Marianne's failure stem from her over-indulged sensibility, which has been fostered by reading novels, and adopting "all the soft feelings and highly refined sensibilities of the respective heroines" (A Gossip's Story, I, 39). Wollstonecraft had also written of the damaging effects of novels on the character, for example in the portrait of the heroine's mother in Mary, a Fiction (1788). Wollstonecraft's praise of West's delineation of the "small causes" which eventually destroy a marriage reflects the desire of both writers to escape the melodrama of the sentimental novel and to substitute a more realistic assessment of life. They have a similar scorn of sentimental conventions. In The Advantages of Education West warns her readers not to expect "extravagance of character, or variety of incident", or life painted in "gaudy and romantic colours" (I, Preface, n. pag.). In the Analytical Review Wollstonecraft considers "[u]nnatural characters, improbable incidents, sad tales of woe rehearsed in an affected, half-prose, half-poetical style, exquisite double-refined sensibility, dazzling beauty, and elegant drapery" to be the features of what she scathingly terms

¹Analytical Review 25 (1797), 25-6. West's description of Marianne is in A Gossip's Story (4th ed. London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), I, 47.

the "truly feminine novel".¹

West, like the feminists, offers a critique of the sentimental virtues frequently encouraged in women. Marianne's tender heart is a drawback because it renders her "unfit to encounter even those common calamities humanity must endure" (A Gossip's Story, I, 19). Like the feminists, West believes in the necessity of female fortitude. In The Advantages of Education Maria's mother is asked not to shock her daughter with details of the suicide of her would-be seducer, Sir Henry Neville. Mrs. Williams refuses to spare Maria, because "she considered fortitude as absolutely necessary in the catalogue of female virtues" (The Advantages of Education, II, 179). In A Gossip's Story Louisa's virtue is to be attributed to her serious education, which has included a wider range of subjects than is usually taught to girls. In The Advantages of Education West urges governesses to concentrate on "moral and intellectual qualities" rather than accomplishments (I, 30). She criticizes the assumption that a young woman's aim is marriage. In the first chapter of The Advantages of Education she explains:

I do not chuse to hold up matrimony as the great desideratum of our sex; I wish them to look to the general esteem of worthy people, and the approbation of their own hearts, for the recompense of their merit, rather than to the particular addresses of a lover (I, 3-4).

The Advantages of Education and A Gossip's Story present ideas about women which are shared by many women novelists of the 1790s. Sensibility is devalued and fortitude admired. A more serious education for women is advocated, and the existing system of education is criticized for its emphasis on attracting a husband. A certain independence and strength of mind in women is valued.

¹Analytical Review 3 (1789), 222.

These are concerns shared by many of the more didactic women novelists throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. West, writing didactic domestic tales, and Wollstonecraft, developing a new feminism, both draw on this didactic, partially feminist tradition of the woman's novel.

These shared ideas, however, do not cancel out the fundamental difference in outlook between Jane West and the feminists of the 1790s. West's first two novels reveal her distrust of her heroines' feelings and judgment, and her insistence on accepting the status quo. In A Gossip's Story, for example, Louisa is praised because of her willingness to stifle her own feelings, even to the extent of agreeing to marry a man she cannot love because his money will save her father from ruin. Her father urges her to marry from a sense of duty. "Personal considerations are beneath your attention. . . . [if] your heart is totally disengaged, I trust your affections may be taught by gratitude to flow in the channel which judgment prescribes" (I, 67). Louisa is saved from marrying Sir William Milton by the timely discovery that he has abandoned a mistress with two children. Her own dislike of him would have been insufficient motive to refuse his proposal. Jane West intends to create in Louisa a truly virtuous woman, a contrast to the conventional heroine dominated by extravagant ideas of romantic love. What she has created, however, is the kind of heroine Wollstonecraft has in mind when she denounces "the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists . . . [in which] virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation than utility" (Rights of Woman, p. 139).

Jane West, like the feminists, wants a better education for women, but the purpose of education in her view is to prepare a girl for a life of duty and self-sacrifice. Mrs. Williams in

The Advantages of Education is her idea of a well-educated woman. Brought up by her father, she learns the classics and is taught to use her reason. Her more important tutor, however, is her friend Mrs. Herbert, who sets the example of self-sacrifice: "to rescue her parents from impending want, [she] had given up a lover whom she justly valued, and united herself to a man destitute of any recommendation, but the possession of wealth" (II, 100). Mrs. Herbert teaches Mrs. Williams to be a dutiful wife to her unsatisfactory husband. When Mrs. Williams lets her husband go to the West Indies alone, Mrs. Herbert tells her that she is "blameably wedded to ease and indulgence in renouncing the matrimonial tie", and advises her to follow her husband to rescue his morals and his fortune (II, 141).

The most important difference between Jane West and the 1790s feminists is her message of acceptance, which contrasts sharply with their note of protest. In A Gossip's Story Marianne's father warns her that "[t]he romantick part of love quickly evaporates, and the soonest with him who has been the most visionary in his expectations. Think yourself happy if the kneeling slave does not change into the Tyrant" (I, 96). Mary Wollstonecraft would agree with this attack on romantic expectations, but not with the message of resignation. In the troubles of Marianne's marriage with Clermont both partners are to blame, but Marianne is more at fault because she should have adjusted her own behaviour to fit in with her husband's nature. Marianne is wrong to persuade Clermont, in front of his friends, not to hunt, for "[a] jest upon the subject of female usurpation is dreadfully grating to lordly man" (II, 92). Marianne should not have told her friend about her argument with Clermont, because female confidants deprive wives of "that happy forgetfulness which is, in many instances, the greatest blessing we can

enjoy" (II, 95). Clermont is undoubtedly to blame for expecting Marianne to forget his offences immediately, but such thoughtlessness is only to be expected in a husband. "Men are remarkably tenacious of their opinions . . . I must advise my sex to be 'easily entreated'" (II, 106). West always shows herself aware of men's dominant position and there is often a hint of resentment in her tone. Her treatment of Clermont contains some acid comments on his desire for masculine authority. Her advice to her readers, however, is always to accept and to submit.

West's three 1790s novels are heavily didactic, and make clear their disapproval of sentimentalism, the French Revolution, and the Rights of Woman. There is an increasing emphasis on the political implications of her morality in the three novels, moving from the domestic concerns of The Advantages of Education to the wider scenes of A Tale of the Times, in which a supporter of the French Revolution is the villain. Her didactic aim is consistent throughout. In The Advantages of Education she attacks the "capricious desires" aroused by reading novels. Her heroine learns to prefer the solid worth of her unexciting suitor Herbert to the attractive but immoral Sir Henry Neville. The sentimentalist's excessive trust in human virtue is the target in A Gossip's Story. In a plot with remarkable similarities to Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, the different temperaments of two sisters are contrasted.¹ Louisa, approaching life with moderate expectations, is eventually happy with a virtuous man. Marianne, naturally amiable and well-meaning, makes the mistake of demanding romantic adoration from a husband, and is bitterly disappointed. Instead of taking ideas from romantic fiction she should have attended to the lessons of Christianity, which teaches us "to curb our passions, and to moderate our desires; to expect

¹See J.M.S. Tompkins, "Elinor and Marianne: A Note on Jane Austen", RES 16 (1940), 33-43.

with diffidence, enjoy with gratitude, and resign with submission" (I, 49).

Jane West's Christian message applies not only to the romantic aspirations of middle- and upper-class girls, but to the discontent of the lower classes, so much in evidence in the 1790s. West notes the "capricious desires" of the lower classes in The Advantages of Education. Complaining that refinement and idleness are spreading from rich young ladies to their housemaids and cooks, she hints that this may be dangerous to the order of society (I, 34-5). In A Tale of the Times her emphasis has switched from unreasonable romantic expectations to the unreasonable expectations roused by radical philosophers, who are undermining society, as Fitzosborne undermines Geraldine's virtue, by advocating the individual's right to fulfilment of his or her desires. Jane West's quotation from Elizabeth Carter, "To temper'd wishes, just desires /Is happiness confin'd", is offered as an answer equally to sentimentalists and revolutionaries (The Advantages of Education, II, 236).

Jane West conveys her anti-sentimental and conservative message through her heroines. She criticizes the idealized sentimental heroine and offers an alternative model, an ordinary girl with common human failings, but with the potential for Christian virtue. In The Advantages of Education she stresses that this is a tale of ordinary life with an ordinary protagonist. Her narrative persona, the old maid Prudentia Homespun, helps to establish the commonsensical, anti-romantic atmosphere of the novel. The narrator assures us that she intended to make her heroine a virtuous but plain girl called Polly, but having been persuaded by a friend that no-one will be interested in such a heroine, she changes the name to Maria and makes her a pretty girl. Even so, "Maria's beauty was not of that striking kind, as

can create universal envy in the women, and adoration in the men. In some of her accomplishments too, she may possibly have been equalled" (I, 5). However limited her charms, Maria manages to attract a dissolute aristocrat, Sir Henry Neville, who conceals his name under the pseudonym Stanley. He courts her in secret, and despite her misgivings Maria does not have the courage to confide in her mother about him. She dismisses him when he tells her that because of unexplained circumstances he is unable to make her a formal proposal of marriage, and after his departure she becomes ill. Her romantically-inclined friend Charlotte Raby immediately concludes that Maria is in a fever induced by passion, and writes to Neville to tell him so. He returns, happy in the hope of restoring Maria's health by his presence, only to be informed that she is suffering from an entirely unromantic disorder -- measles.

Parodies of sentimental attitudes are found in A Gossip's Story as well. Marianne models herself on the sentimental heroines of the adventures and memoirs she has read, and thus unfits herself for ordinary life and decisions. Her decision whether or not to accept Pelham is made more difficult by her fear that her friend Eliza is in love with him and in danger of being hurt. "She had not indeed any grounds for this suspicion but the friendship which subsisted between the ladies was of a romantic kind", explains the narrator drily (I, 38). Her immediate attraction to Clermont, who saves her from a runaway horse, is similar to Marianne Dashwood's sudden passion for Willoughby. "Never was such a wonderful coincidence of opinion! Both were passionate admirers of the country; both loved moonlight walks, and the noise of distant waterfalls" (I, 205). On the basis of such feelings they rush into marriage, only to find that after two weeks of honeymoon they are thoroughly bored in

each other's company.

Such parodies of overused sentimental conventions afford some amusement in the novels, but they are thinly spread. Jane West prefers to make her anti-romantic moral clear through simple didactic statements, and these are to be found on almost every page. Many of them echo the sentiments of the preface to The Advantages of Education, in which she explains that she thought it

more adviseable to describe life as [young women] are likely to find it, than to adorn it with those gaudy and romantic colours in which it is commonly depicted. . . . it is but seldom that they will be called forth to perform high acts of heroic excellence, but . . . they will be daily required to exert those humble duties and social virtues, wherein the chief part of our merit and our happiness consists (The Advantages of Education, I, Preface n. pag.).

The Advantages of Education chronicles Maria's education in humble duties and social virtues.

Maria learns to value a quiet life spent carrying out her domestic duties and administering charity to the poor. Her quiet usefulness is contrasted to Charlotte Raby's tender sensibility, which prevents her from being able to face a visit to a poor family's cottage. Maria demonstrates her prudence by refusing to go to a ball with Charlotte because she knows her mother is worried that she might acquire a taste for high life, but she is still foolish enough to romanticize this simple renunciation, comparing herself in imagination to Portia and Lucretia (I, 55). Mrs. Williams soon takes her mind away from such ideas by telling her of the sufferings of poor families in the neighbourhood. She is one of the chief exponents of West's view that practical concerns must banish attempts at heroism. It is because Maria has learned the practice of virtue in these small incidents that when she faces a larger trial, she acts as she should. On learning that Neville has seduced and abandoned

a girl she rejects him without hesitation, and conquers her grief for her mother's sake.

Virtue in A Gossip's Story is also measured by behaviour in small incidents of everyday life. Louisa's goodness manifests itself in her endeavours to entertain her father's guests despite inward unhappiness, and in her cheerfulness during their tedious residence in Seatondell, despite her concealed and apparently hopeless love for Pelham. Marianne, despite good intentions, fails to be virtuous because she cannot control her feelings in order to act with consideration for others. The failure of her marriage begins in small failures of self-discipline. She cannot conceal from Clermont that his mother has upset her, and so causes a family quarrel. She makes herself vulnerable to public gossip by leaving a public engagement with Clermont's friend Aubrey. Innocent of any serious wrongdoing, Marianne endangers her reputation and eventually loses her husband's love because she failed to heed her father's advice: "banish from your heart that extreme sensibility you have hitherto cherished" (II, 41).

The Advantages of Education and A Gossip's Story could perhaps be described as anti-novels, so fundamental is West's opposition to the conventions of her genre. Her scorn for the novel as a form is evident in her explanation why her first novel did not sell well. "It had no splendour of language, no local description, nothing of the marvellous, or the enigmatical, no sudden elevation, and no astonishing depression. It merely spoke of human life as it is, and so simple was the story, that at the outset an attentive reader must have foreboded the catastrophe" (A Gossip's Story, I, xi-xii). It is not unreasonable for a writer interested in "life as it is" to be sarcastic about the generality of popular sentimental and Gothic novels. However, West's apparent apology reveals a deep-seated

disapproval of the medium she is using. In this passage art and life are totally separated, and art is presented as something worthless because unreal. "Life as it is" is seen as the only legitimate subject for writing, and by implication it excludes splendour, mystery and surprise. Jane West's novels suffer not from her commitment to reality but because of her narrow interpretation of it.

The Advantages of Education and A Gossip's Story, however, are novels despite their author's reluctance, and are recognisably part of the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition. Before Maria settles down to married life, she takes part in the well-established sentimental plot, in which her honour is threatened by an attractive rake. Despite Jane West's distrust of emotion, suffering must enter the tale when Maria repents of her foolishness and rejects Neville. Having carefully established that Maria is not a romantic heroine, West describes her in sentimental clichés after all: "Maria bent under the feelings of love, grief, and resentment, with all the delicacy and elegance of a broken lily" (II, 71). Louisa of A Gossip's Story also becomes a heroine somewhat against her author's intentions. Louisa's virtue is supposed to lie in her practical, sensible adaptation to life as it is. However, West adopts the conventions of the novel and gives Louisa a trial common to many sentimental heroines. She is torn between her duty to her father, who wants her to marry Sir William Milton, and her love for Pelham, which must be suppressed because he is her sister's admirer. Her superiority over Marianne consists primarily in her ability to control her emotions for the sake of others; but there must be emotions to control. When "with eyes swimming in tears, and looks full of anxiety and consternation" she begs not to be made to marry Sir William, she has become a sentimental heroine (I, 60).

West's concessions to her genre in the first two novels are relatively minor. Her third novel, A Tale of the Times, makes more concessions to novelistic convention. In her first two novels she prided herself on writing about mundane matters and avoiding the improbable, but in A Tale of the Times she invents a plot in which a very unconvincing villain plots the seduction of Geraldine, a married woman. He eventually rapes her, and while she dies repenting of her errors, he commits suicide to avoid the guillotine. This is the sort of melodrama Jane West professes to despise. A Tale of the Times, however, is intended, like the first two works, as an anti-novel. It is the emphasis of the author's attack which has changed. The first two novels attempt a satire on sentimental attitudes and conventions, whereas A Tale of the Times attacks the novels of radical writers.

The characters are similar to those of A Gossip's Story. Geraldine, like Marianne, has good intentions but too much sensibility, and Lucy Evans, like Louisa, is quietly virtuous, and is eventually rewarded with the good man her foolish friend failed to appreciate. The atmosphere of A Tale of the Times is melodramatic, in contrast to the tone of gentle irony predominating in the first two novels. Geraldine, like Marianne, is warned that "innocence alone will not support you, and sensibility will betray you", but the note is more urgent.¹ In The Advantages of Education too retired a life is the prelude to romantic delusion, and some contact with the world outside the parental home is a desirable part of female education. In A Tale of the Times the world is a much more dangerous place, full of evil people who attempt to undermine the principles of morality. Edward Fitzosborne is a villain whose "vices were systematic, the result of design, guided by method, sanctioned by

¹A Tale of the Times, I, 237.

sophistry, and originating from the covert war which he waged, not merely against the chastity, but also against the principles of his victims" (A Tale of the Times, II, 153). He insinuates his way into Geraldine's confidence with his flattery and his specious talk of equality, and proceeds to undermine her principles with arguments drawn from Wollstonecraft, Hays and Godwin. The ideas of these writers are denounced in fervent passages which predict disaster on a grand scale:

Should it . . . be told to future ages, that the capricious dissolubility (if not the absolute nullity) of the nuptial tie and the annihilation of parental authority are among the blasphemies uttered by the moral instructors of these times . . . they will not ascribe the annihilation of thrones and altars to the successful arms of France, but to those principles which, by dissolving domestic confidence and undermining private worth, paved the way for universal confusion (II, 274-5).

With the strong tide of reaction against revolution, Jane West changes her manner from gently satiric moralist to panic-stricken anti-Jacobin.

Jane West's dislike of the genre in which she works, already noted in her first two novels, is strongly felt in A Tale of the Times. At the end of the story she criticizes the use of the novel by progressives for political purposes. She complains that "the novel, calculated, by its insinuating narrative and interesting description to fascinate the imagination without rousing the stronger energies of the mind, is converted into an offensive weapon, directed against our religion, our morals, or our government" (III, 388). Even at its best, West implies, the novel is a frivolous thing, representing by its very nature a danger to morality. It is not surprising, therefore, that after this novel she turned to writing a straightforward didactic homily, Letters Addressed to a Young Man (1801), despite warnings

that a work without the appeal of fiction might not sell.¹ She returned to fiction soon afterwards, but made it clear that she did so with reluctance. In the introduction to her next novel she explained that the "rage for novels does not decrease; and, though I by no means think them the best vehicles for 'the words of sound doctrine;' yet, while the enemies of our church and state continue to pour their poison into unwary ears through this channel, it behoves the friends of our establishments to convey an antidote by the same course".²

West's evident distaste for the task she set herself in writing novels was certainly detrimental to her success as a novelist. Paradoxically this sharp critic of the novel creates characters and plots in a very conventional mould, perhaps because she does not consider the details of novels worth the effort of original creation. Even with her stereotyped situations, some comedy could have been produced if she had made more effort to develop the ironic touches present in all her novels. As it is her novels lack the comedy which enlivens other anti-Jacobin novels, notably Elizabeth Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers and George Walker's The Vagabond. Her concern is narrowly didactic, and her favourite method is to state her moral without having recourse to fictional trappings. The Monthly's review of A Tale of the Times complains about her frequent intrusions into the narrative to explain the plot, and accuses her of "barrenness of invention".³

Jane West attacks the sentimental ideal of womanhood depicted in so many eighteenth-century novels, but the ideal with which she would wish to replace this false idol is not easily

¹See the letter from Bishop Percy to Jane West, June 7, 1800, in Nichols' Illustrations, Vol. VIII (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1858), p. 328.

²The Infidel Father (London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1802), I, ii.

³Monthly Review 2nd ser. 29 (1799), 90.

made into good fiction. Her ideal woman is represented by Louisa Dudley of A Gossip's Story, who quietly endures various trials, and then settles down to an uneventful married life; or by Lucy Evans of A Tale of the Times, who remains in the background of Geraldine's life, unobtrusively practising Christian virtues; or by the mothers in her novels, Mrs. Williams of The Advantages of Education and Mrs. Evans of A Tale of the Times, who offer wise moral guidance to female youth at risk. These characters could be made interesting, but not by Jane West, who considers one of their chief virtues to be their lack of that dangerous quality, fictional fascination.

Inevitably, then, the centre of the stage is taken over by the contrasting female character, the one who acts as a warning rather than an example. There is a progression in this direction in the three novels. In The Advantages of Education the more admirable of the two young girls is the heroine, who is not an ideal character but a well-meaning one who is able to learn from her mistakes. In A Gossip's Story Marianne and Louisa are both important characters. In A Tale of the Times, the virtuous character who prefers to stay in the background is kept there. There is very little to say about Lucy Evans once her virtue and Christian resignation have been established, while there is a story to be told about Geraldine, however much Jane West dislikes telling it.

It is logical for Jane West to reduce to a minimum the part played by the ideal woman in her novel. An ideal woman's life, in her estimation, cannot and should not be interesting. Charlotte Lennox, as we have seen, puts forward a similar argument through the countess in The Female Quixote, but Lennox, fortunately for the entertainment value of her novel, ignores her countess's argument and writes of the adventures of her heroine.

Jane West, on the other hand, takes her belief in the uneventfulness of a virtuous woman's life to its logical conclusion. The sentimental heroine is abolished from her third novel. West is trying to eradicate the habit of emulating the heroines of novels. She is trying to persuade young girls that their object should be a sober, uneventful Christian life, and that they should despise the attractions of sentimental or philosophical novels. Her ultimate aim, perhaps, is to wean her readers away from novels altogether, and persuade them instead to read, and live according to, her didactic tracts.

CHAPTER 10

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

In her Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

Wollstonecraft discusses the oppressive nature of the conventions governing female behaviour. In her novels, Mary, a Fiction (1788), and Maria; or The Wrongs of Woman (1798), she rebels against the conventions governing women's writing, and her introduction of subjects taboo to most late eighteenth-century women novelists has been noted. Séjourné praises the boldness of her treatment of the themes of prostitution and illegitimacy in The Wrongs of Woman, and points out the originality of the character of Jemima.¹ However, he finds that in this novel, and in all novels by radical women in the 1790s, the heroine remains a feeble, sentimental creature, "un être fragile, 'née seulement pour sentir'".²

His criticism indicates a crucial question about Wollstonecraft's novels. Maria, as he points out, is described as "only born to feel",³ yet Wollstonecraft's intention in both her novels is to criticize the conventional heroine. Her critical purpose has not always been recognized by those who describe her fiction as "sentimental nonsense", or "melodramatic, wildly improbable".⁴ Concentrating on the autobiographical

¹Séjourné, p. 180-81.

²Séjourné, p. 468.

³The Wrongs of Woman, in Mary, a Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman ed. Gary Kelly (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 98.

⁴Ralph M. Wardle, on Mary, in Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography (London: The Richards Press; and Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1951), p. 75; and Emily Sunstein, on The Wrongs of Woman, in A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 329. Unfavourable estimates of Wollstonecraft as a novelist are also found in Margaret Tims, Mary Wollstonecraft: A Social Pioneer (London: Millington Books Ltd., 1976), p. 68 and p. 321; and in Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft p. 251.

element in Wollstonecraft's novels, many critics have underestimated her ability to detach herself from her heroines. Séjourné, on the other hand, recognizes that Wollstonecraft is dissatisfied with the sentimental heroine, but considers her unsuccessful in her attempted rejection of the conventional image. A more favourable view of Wollstonecraft's achievements in fiction is found in Janet Todd's analysis of her novels as studies in the problems women face, particularly in female friendship, when they are trapped by conventional notions of feminine sensibility.¹

This appreciation of Wollstonecraft's detachment from her heroines, which enables Todd to see Mary, for example, as a "case study",² is crucial to an understanding of her novels. Though Wollstonecraft's heroines have sensibility, Wollstonecraft does not mean to idealize this. I hope to show that while her first novel deserves some of the criticisms of sentimentality it has received, because it fails to escape the ideology of sensibility which the author claims to reject, her second novel is a skilful analysis of the problems of "feminine" sensibility and its relation to reason. In spite of its fragmentary state -- it was left unfinished at Wollstonecraft's death in 1797 -- it deserves further consideration. It shows, more perhaps than any of her other works, her "extraordinary insight into the difficult relationship between feminism and femininity".³

The question of this relationship is important in the 1790s, and it is Wollstonecraft who raises the question. Her Rights of Woman provides the rationale for the feminist attack on feminine

¹See her Women's Friendship in Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 191-226.

²Todd, p. 192.

³Margaret Walters, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, Simone de Beauvoir", in The Rights and Wrongs of Women ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1976), p. 308.

sensibility. She attacks the eighteenth-century feminine ideal and advocates reason instead of sensibility. Women are to acquire "strength, both of mind and body", once they are convinced that the feminine qualities so exalted by men are created by the oppression of women and tend to perpetuate that oppression: "Dismissing . . . those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue" (Rights of Woman, pp. 81-2). Wollstonecraft persistently attacks the notion, so popular with sentimental novelists, that women are especially virtuous. Women, she writes, are said to have "more goodness of heart; piety, and benevolence. I doubt the fact . . . unless ignorance be allowed to be the mother of devotion" (p. 141). Sensibility does not deserve the name of virtue, being merely "the most exquisitely polished instinct" (p. 155). Wollstonecraft urges women, "let us endeavour to strengthen our minds by reflection till our heads become a balance for our hearts" (p. 190).

The application of these feminist criticisms of sensibility to the sentimental heroine can be found in the criticism of fiction which Wollstonecraft wrote for the Analytical Review.¹

¹Wollstonecraft wrote reviews for the Analytical from 1788-late 1792, and from early 1796 until her death. The identification of her reviews has been a subject of disagreement between R.M. Wardle and Derek Roper. Wardle attributes to her reviews initialled W, M, and T, and unsigned reviews preceding these. Roper disputes the argument in favour of the unsigned reviews. See Wardle, "Mary Wollstonecraft, Analytical Reviewer", PMLA 62 (1947), 1000-1009, and Roper, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Reviews", Notes and Queries 203, n.s. 5 (1958), 37-38. While agreeing with Roper that "no unsigned article can safely be attributed to her on the sole evidence that her signature is the next to follow", (p. 38), I find strong internal evidence of her authorship of some of the unsigned reviews. Unless otherwise stated, however, all reviews quoted by me as hers are initialled M or W. The initial T is not used in the Analytical's reviews of novels.

Her reviews consistently show her dislike of the weakness and passivity of heroines. She observes sardonically that Charlotte Smith's heroine Emmeline, on hearing Delamere declare his passion for her, "weeps and trembles as an heroine ought to do on such an occasion".¹ In her review of Arundel she is caustic about the heroine, who "trembling alive all o'er . . . is hurried to the very verge of the grave by exquisite and impetuous sensibility".² She complains that A.M. Bennett's Agnes de Courci tends "to exalt passive above active virtue".³ She particularly dislikes the novelistic convention that a heroine's virtues are innate. In reviewing Julia de Gramont she remarks that she "cannot attempt to soar to the exalted altitude of inborn sensibility".⁴

The last citation suggests the connection between objections to the cult of sensibility and radical philosophy. Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman is important for bringing together women's rights and the radicalism of the 1790s,⁵ and her reviews show the link between radical and feminist dislike of the sentimental heroine. Against the innate virtue exalted by, among others, most of the novelists of sensibility, radicals like Godwin and Paine posited their view of human character as formed by environment. Wollstonecraft is bound to deny women's innate virtues, as her argument depends on her showing that women's faults are the result of adverse environment and education, not of innate inferiority. Her

¹Analytical Review 1 (1788), 328.

²Analytical Review 3 (1789), 68-9.

³Analytical Review 6 (1790), 97.

⁴Analytical Review 1 (1788), 334.

⁵For a discussion of Wollstonecraft's radicalism see Elissa S. Guralnick, "Radical Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", Studies in Burke and His Time 18 (1977), 155-166.

Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) is her most extreme example of a rationalist, radical position which denies innate qualities. Replying to Burke, who in Reflections on the Revolution in France argued against the revolution by appealing to innate sentiments and chivalrous instincts, she accuses him of using "sentimental jargon",¹ and explains the connection between radicalism and rationalism: "What moral purpose can be answered by extolling good dispositions, as they are called, when these good dispositions are described as instincts . . . if virtue is to be acquired by experience, or taught by example, reason, perfected by reflection, must be the director of the whole host of passions" (pp. 73-4).

The rational stance which supports a radical argument in Rights of Men is used in a more conservative way in Wollstonecraft's reviews between 1788 and 1792. As we have seen in Chapter 8, conservative moralists were as firm as radical philosophers in advocating the rational rather than the sentimental; and Wollstonecraft, as a reviewer, often sounds like these moralists. She advocates moral principle instead of romantic feelings, and denounces the sensuality which she finds in works of sentiment. Moore's Zeluco (1789) is said to be better than "insignificant sentimental productions" because in it "[s]ound principles are . . . inculcated . . . [based] on reason rather than transient feelings".² The author of Mount Pelham, who hints that a virtuous female is susceptible to passion, "prone . . . to love the offender, yet detest the offence", rouses from her the indignant comment, "This is the varnish of sentiment to hide

¹A Vindication of the Rights of Men, ed. E.L. Nicholes (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1960), p. 68.

²Analytical Review 5 (1789), 103.

sensuality".¹ She criticizes works which "engender false notions in the minds of young persons, who . . . imagine themselves sentimental, when they are only devoid of restraining principles, the sure and solid support of virtue".²

Only by changing her views on reason, which was used to support conservative morality as well as radical philosophy, could Wollstonecraft write The Wrongs of Woman with its defence of the heroine's right to sexual freedom. However, one opinion which Wollstonecraft continues to share with conservative moralists becomes a pervasive theme in her work. Her reviews often express the conventional eighteenth-century complaint that novels arouse romantic expectations. Of Emmeline she writes: "the false expectations which these wild scenes excite, tend to debauch the mind, and throw an insipid kind of uniformity over the moderate and rational prospects of life, consequently adventures are sought for and created, when duties are neglected, and content despised".³ A novel like Arundel "must inspire the young women who eagerly peruse it, with false notions and hopes, teach them affectation, and shake their principles by representing love as irresistible, love at first sight".⁴ Mary and The Wrongs of Woman are both partly conceived as illustrations of these points, and both are based on the author's own experiences. Her attitude to romantic delusion is critical, but her sympathy for her deluded heroines is immediately evident. In the earlier novel, her sympathy means that she is implicated in her heroine's false judgments; but in The Wrongs of Woman, with a combination of critical analysis and sympathy, Wollstonecraft moves towards a

¹Analytical Review 3 (1789), 222.

²Analytical Review 1 (1788), 335.

³Analytical Review 1 (1788), 333.

⁴Analytical Review 3 (1789), 69.

more complex understanding of the problems of a late eighteenth-century feminine sensibility.

Mary shows the author's early desire to break away from the conventional notion of a sentimental heroine. In the Advertisement Wollstonecraft declares her intent "to develop a character different from those generally portrayed. This woman is neither a Clarissa, a Lady G--, nor a Sophie".¹ Early in Mary Wollstonecraft differentiates her work, carefully subtitled a "Fiction", from "those most delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation, novels" (Mary, p. 2), which would have corrupted the heroine's mother if she had thought about the love-scenes she read (p. 3). Wollstonecraft introduces her alternative to fashionable sensibility, a heroine who is, she claims, a woman of "thinking powers" (Advertisement). Mary is meant to offer evidence for Rousseau's belief that "a genius will educate itself".² Having been "left to the operations of her own mind, she considered every thing that came under her inspection, and learned to think" (p. 4).

Mary is praised for her independent mind, but is not drawn without criticism. "Her understanding was strong and clear, when not clouded by her feelings; but she was too much the creature of impulse, and the slave of compassion" (p. 7). Her capacity for self-delusion is described. She idealizes her friend Ann, and then is disappointed in her. When Ann becomes ill, Mary deceives herself again: "Mary then forgot every thing but the fear of losing [Ann], and even imagined that her recovery

¹Mary in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, Advertisement, n. pag.

²See Wollstonecraft's letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, March 4, 1787. for her comment on this as Rousseau's opinion; and her letter to Henry Dyson Gabell, September 13, 1787, for her description of Mary as "a tale, to illustrate an opinion of mine, that a genius will educate itself". Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 145 and p. 162.

would have made her happy" (p. 17). Despite these attempts at critical analysis, however, Wollstonecraft so obviously identifies with her heroine that her presentation of Mary fails to transcend the feminine sensibility she intends to criticize. Sensitive Mary is contrasted, like many other sentimental heroines, to the cold, silly, fashionable women who surround her. She meets Henry, who arouses her compassion and love, but she is tied to the absent husband she married to satisfy her dying mother, and the relationship with Henry is platonic, unsatisfactory, and soon ended by his death. Mary eventually agrees, with inward loathing, to live with her husband. Throughout the novel the sensitivity and compassion which set her apart bring her dissatisfaction and unhappiness, and the people she helps and loves fail to satisfy her need for gratitude and affection. She pities herself and has the sympathy of her author. Wollstonecraft even praises her for the conventional attributes of a heroine which elsewhere she condemns as weakness. Mary is "diffident; she seldom joined in general conversations" (p. 22), and she has a "delicate sense of propriety" (p. 26).

Mary's failure to escape the mould of the sentimental heroine is explained by her author's idealization of sensibility. Mary writes a "rhapsody on sensibility", that "most exquisite feeling of which the human soul is susceptible" (p. 53). It is very similar to the praise of sensibility attributed to the sage in The Cave of Fancy, an unfinished work begun in 1787 but soon abandoned.¹ While writing this, and her first novel, Wollstonecraft was working for Lord and Lady Kingsborough as a governess, and letters written at this time show that she was creating an image of herself as a sentimental heroine. To

¹See Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman (London: J. Johnson and G.G. and J. Robinson, 1798), IV, 135-7.

George Blood she confesses, "I have fostered too great a refinement of mind, and given a keener edge to the sensibility nature gave me".¹ "The nervous fever I am subject to has increased my natural sensibility" she tells her sister Everina.² In contrast to herself, Lady Kingsborough is "devoid of sensibility", and so are the Irish women, whose prettiness is pleasing but does not inspire love. "They catch the senses -- 'tis beauty's province -- but sensibility can only reach the heart".³ It is not surprising that a novel written while its author was indulging in this kind of self-dramatization projected a conventional image of feminine sensibility.

Wollstonecraft's first novel, however, offers at least some insight into conventional feminine sensibility by revealing its inadequacy. Mary is counselled, as are many sentimental heroines, to combine self-control with sensibility. Advising her to live with her husband, Henry tells her, "Try, my love, to fulfil thy destined course -- try to add to thy other virtues patience" (p. 61). The difference between Mary and conventional heroines is that she finds this impossible:

I am a wretch! and she heaved a sigh that almost broke her heart, while the big tears rolled down her burning cheeks; but still her exercised mind, accustomed to think, began to observe its operation . . . Wherefore am I made thus? Vain are my efforts -- I cannot live without loving -- and love leads to madness (p. 62).

This passage, showing the conflict between reason and emotion leading to the threat of madness, anticipates the concerns of The Wrongs of Woman. It also hints at an understanding of the role

¹To George Blood, December 4, 1786; in Collected Letters, p. 128.

²To Everina Wollstonecraft, March 4, 1787; in Collected Letters, p. 143.

³To Everina Wollstonecraft, May 11, 1787; in Collected Letters, p. 151 and p. 152.

prescribed to a woman of sensibility, which is made more explicit in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Mary's over-developed sensibility makes her dependent on love, yet it is that very dependence that Henry expects her, as a sentimental heroine, to overcome. As Wollstonecraft writes later in the Rights of Woman: "woman -- weak woman -- made by her education the slave of sensibility, is required, on the most trying occasions, to resist that sensibility" (Rights of Woman, p. 232).

It was after completing Mary that Wollstonecraft became acquainted with radical thinkers, through her work for Joseph Johnson on the Analytical Review. During this period she adopted democratic principles and greeted the French Revolution with enthusiasm. Radical philosophy instead of sensibility informs her two Vindications, the Rights of Men (1790) and the Rights of Woman (1792). Wollstonecraft was never a complete rationalist and both of these works are disrupted by passionate anger. In the Rights of Woman, however, sexual love is singled out for a rationalist attack. There should be "an endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion [sexual love], and to prove that it should not be allowed to . . . usurp the sceptre which the understanding should ever coolly wield" (p. 110). Though sexual desire is natural in young people, it will not and should not last. "In order to fulfil the duties of life . . . a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion" (p. 114). Wollstonecraft even claims that it is a good thing for wives to be neglected by their husbands: "an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family . . . the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother. And this would almost always be the consequence if the female mind were more enlarged" (p. 114). A woman reading of this predicted consequence of female emancipation might well exclaim with

Wollstonecraft's first heroine, "have I desires implanted in me only to make me miserable? will they never be gratified? shall I never be happy?" (Mary, p. 40).

It is well-known that soon after writing the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft became a prey to the passion she denounced, and the long and painful break-up of her affair with Gilbert Imlay has been recorded in detail.¹ These events of her life, first publicly revealed in Godwin's Memoirs of her in 1798, were considered by supporters and detractors alike to damage her arguments for women's rights. While the British Critic called her "a woman of strong intellect, and ungovernable passions. . . . a voluptuary and sensualist",² a reviewer in the Monthly Magazine and American Review lamented that her worthy endeavours "to rescue the minds of females from the lethargy that has so long oppressed them" were spoiled by her later belief in "unrestrained indulgence of the feelings".³ Wollstonecraft's experience between the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman taught her not to dismiss the importance of feelings in the question of women's emancipation.

The Wrongs of Woman is a more profound study of feminine sensibility than Mary. The prison in which Maria is confined is an image of the world for women. Maria wonders at one point why she should try to escape. "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (The Wrongs of Woman, p. 79). She analyses the way in which prison, like women's imprisonment in sensibility, destroys natural powers. At first Maria thinks she can devise a way of escape, for "surely some expedient might occur to an active mind, without any other employment" (p. 77).

¹See, especially, her letters to Imlay in Collected Letters, and R.M. Wardle's Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography, Chapter VIII.

²British Critic 12 (1798), 235.

³Monthly Magazine and American Review 1 (1799), 330 and 331.

Her experience soon shows her that an active mind, imprisoned, turns inwards. She spends her first weeks of captivity writing her memoirs, and then is "angry with herself for having been amused by writing her narrative; and grieved to think that she had for an instant thought of any thing, but contriving to escape" (p. 85).

Maria turns to romantic delusion. Like Mary, she needs someone to love because of her own sensibility, but she is treated with a much greater degree of critical detachment. She first thinks of Darnford as "an unfortunate being, oppressed by a similar fate", because he, too, is wrongly imprisoned in the madhouse (p. 85). Later, she sees that the fate of the warder, Jemima, bears a more profound similarity to her own. Impressed by the marginal comments in Darnford's books, Maria thinks of him as her soul-mate, and Wollstonecraft remarks, "What a creative power has an affectionate heart! There are beings who cannot live without loving" (p. 86). Ashamed of feeling disappointed at not seeing Darnford in the garden, Maria reflects on "how difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits" (p. 87). Despite her awareness of the problem she faces, Maria's view of Darnford becomes idealized. Catching sight of him after reading La Nouvelle Héloïse, she identifies him with St. Preux, and "if she lent St. Preux, or the demi-god of her fancy, his form, she richly repaid him by the donation of all St. Preux's sentiments and feelings, culled to gratify her own" (p. 89). Maria is compared with Pygmalion, who "formed an ivory maid, and longed for an informing soul. She, on the contrary, combined all the qualities of a hero's mind, and fate presented a statue in which she might enshrine them" (p. 99).

Besides treating Maria's love for Darnford as a romantic delusion caused by her imprisonment, and by implication, the

imprisonment of all women of her class in feminine sensibility. Wollstonecraft also intends to defend Maria's affair with him. Maria's uncle argues that divorce should be allowed where a husband does not merit his wife's esteem. Darnford tells her that she should consider herself free to love another, and his use of the word 'sensibility' clearly implies sexual desire: "Delicacy, as well as reason, forbade her ever to think of returning to her husband: was she then to restrain her charming sensibility through mere prejudice?" (p. 187). Maria herself argues that in women, as well as men, sexual desires "spring in some respects involuntarily" (pp. 152-3), and professes herself disgusted when "novelists or moralists praise as a virtue, a woman's coldness of constitution, and want of passion" (p. 153). Acting on these principles she lives with Darnford, and defends her conduct in court when Venables sues Darnford for seduction and adultery.

Wollstonecraft means to support her heroine's stance, but in making Darnford an unsatisfactory and unfaithful lover, she punishes her as a conservative novelist of the time would punish an erring heroine. It is impossible not to draw parallels between Darnford and Imlay, the lover whose infidelity had twice driven Wollstonecraft to suicide attempts in 1795. It is not surprising that Maria's story, like Wollstonecraft's own life, appeared to contemporaries to offer all the necessary proof that her theories were wrong. The Critical Review and the Anti-Jacobin Review both stressed that Maria brings her troubles on herself by her misguided choice of husband.¹ Even the Analytical Review, which was in favour of the work, commented that Maria was "represented as too easily impressed".²

¹See Critical Review n.s. 22 (1798), 418; and Anti-Jacobin Review 1 (1798), 92.

²Analytical Review 27 (1798), 241.

It is, however, crucial to Wollstonecraft's point that Maria is too easily impressed. Wollstonecraft had never argued for women's rights on the grounds that women's evident sense and wisdom proved they deserved them; on the contrary, in the Rights of Woman she insisted that treating women as inferior had made them inferior. In the Author's Preface to The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft defends herself against anticipated protests that her heroine is at fault:

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

Here, Wollstonecraft is criticizing the convention of the sentimental heroine who can do no wrong, whose sensibility, however strong, never leads her to offend against rationality. She is defending her heroine's right to make mistakes.

Wollstonecraft's feminism is the more complex and the more progressive because she refuses to take the stance of radicals in the early 1790s, that reason conquers all. Maria's capacity for feeling makes her vulnerable, but is also a positive value. Women's capacity for feeling is one of the novel's main preoccupations. There are really two heroines, Maria and her warder, Jemima. They both tell their stories at length, revealing the injustices suffered by high- and low-class women. Maria suffers the wrongs of the genteel woman: she develops romantic expectations, she marries unwisely, and her gambling husband tries to obtain the fortune settled on her. His machinations to deprive her of her fortune eventually lead to her imprisonment in a madhouse, away from her baby girl. Jemima's is a tale of even greater hardship. Born illegitimate, she is a despised drudge until puberty, when she is raped by her master

and dismissed on becoming pregnant. After an abortion she becomes a prostitute, and after a period of relative comfort as the mistress of a gentleman, she tries, without success, to earn her living as a laundress. She steals, is imprisoned, and finally becomes an attendant in the madhouse, an occupation for which she has been fitted by years of brutalization.

An important theme in the novel is the growing friendship between Maria and Jemima. It is important not only because it shows "the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various" (Author's Preface, p. 74), but because it brings together the two kinds of women thought to be irreconcilably alien, the pure woman and the prostitute. Maria soon sees a potential for sympathy in her stern warder, and learns to treat her as a friend. Darnford sees Maria as an entirely different creature from the impure women with whom he has formerly associated. He tells her "I will not disgust you with a recital of the vices of my youth, which can scarcely be comprehended by female delicacy. I was taught to love by a creature I am ashamed to mention; and the other women with whom I afterwards became intimate, were of a class of which you can have no knowledge" (p. 94). All the assumptions in this speech are attacked in the novel. The "female delicacy" which cannot understand vice is seen as an unnatural attribute of oppressed women, making them less, not more, womanly, because it deprives them of their capacity for sympathy. Far from fulfilling Darnford's expectations, Maria is the friend of Jemima, a woman of the type that Darnford, despite his willingness to exploit them sexually, is "ashamed to mention". Wollstonecraft left various notes for the ending of the novel. Darnford was to prove unfaithful, and one of the notes ends with "Pregnancy --

Miscarriage -- Suicide" (p. 202). A fuller fragment describes a suicide attempt, interrupted by Jemima, who restores to Maria the child they had believed dead. This suggestion shows Wollstonecraft's belief in the potential strength of women's sympathy. The divisions created between Jemima and Maria by their positions in society break down under the force of sympathy between the two women. One of the most moving parts of the novel is where Maria, in answer to Jemima's cry, "Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow-creature?" takes her hand (p. 119).

The contrast between Maria and Jemima is an important theme in the novel. One is trapped by sensibility, and the other hardened by injustice, thus indicating the two extremes of women's psychological development in a male-dominated society. Maria's reaction to her imprisonment establishes the psychological theme:

To the master of this most horrid of prisons, she had, soon after her entrance, raved of injustice, in accents which would have justified his treatment, had not a malignant smile, when she appealed to his judgment, with a dreadful conviction stifled her remonstrating complaints (p. 77).

The only alternatives given to Maria here are submission or madness. For self-preservation she submits temporarily, but madness continues to threaten her. Her dilemma is shown to apply not only to her particular circumstances, but to women's condition generally. Maria realises that there are two possible reactions to imprisonment and the sorrow it brings. "Indulged sorrow, she perceived, must blunt or sharpen the faculties to the two opposite extremes; producing stupidity, the moping melancholy of indolence; or the restless activity of a disturbed imagination" (p. 79). Maria, afraid that one of these effects will be produced by her own sorrow, meets Jemima, whose experience illustrates Maria's reasoning. Though Jemima cannot be accused of indulging the sorrows which have been thrust upon her, the

development of her character demonstrates one of the two reactions of women to their wrongs. Her faculties have been blunted and her emotions stifled by horrific experiences. The nadir of her brutalization is when she herself adds to the wrongs of her sex, persuading her new lover to turn his pregnant mistress out of the house, and thus driving the girl to suicide. While Jemima's feelings are blunted, Maria's are sharpened and tend to "restless activity". This produces, as well as her occasional lapses into near-madness, her romantic idealization of Darnford. Jemima has submitted to the prison of womanhood, while Maria, not having submitted completely, is liable to the dangers of self-delusion and madness.

The only hope for both these women is to join together. To Wollstonecraft, feeling is of the utmost importance in freeing women. Maria's heightened feelings are necessary if there is to be any struggle against male authority, and it is Maria, who has not submitted, who must make the first overtures if she and Jemima are to unite. She succeeds because Jemima's "humanity had rather been benumbed than killed, by the keen frost she had to brave at her entrance into life" (p. 120). In the movement towards liberation, emotion comes before reasoned perception of injustice. Maria reaches Jemima, not by appealing to her sense of justice, but by rousing her dormant compassion. "Though she failed immediately to rouse a lively sense of injustice in the mind of her guard, because it had been sophisticated into misanthropy, she touched her heart" (p. 79). They become allies.

Throughout the novel, Wollstonecraft demonstrates how the experience of oppression can drive women against each other. A respectable woman refuses to help Jemima because she has been a kept mistress. Jemima's cruelty to the pregnant girl, and her employment as Maria's guard in the madhouse, are evidence of her

isolation from other women. When Maria leaves her husband, landladies are afraid to harbour her, because the law is on her husband's side. It is a woman who takes Maria's baby from her. Such incidents are seen as failures of womanhood, and arouse indignant grief. Maria wonders, for example, "How could a creature in a female form" take a child from its mother (p. 183). In contrast to these incidents is the friendship between Maria and Jemima, which leads to Maria's release from the madhouse and Jemima's freedom from isolation and emotional numbness.

The emphasis in The Wrongs of Woman, then, is on the importance of feeling. Wollstonecraft is aware of women's capacity for feeling as a legacy of oppression: as a weakness, and as a strength. The word "woman" is often used as a synonym for emotion, whether laudable sympathy or weak susceptibility. Maria is unable to tell her landlady where she is going, in case she is betrayed to the landlady's husband, and through him to her own. She writes in her memoir:

I was fully convinced, that a few kind words from Johnny would have found the woman in her, and her dear benefactress, as she termed me in an agony of tears, would have been sacrificed, to recompense her tyrant for condescending to treat her like an equal (p. 173).

Though feeling has its dangers, it is feeling which can bring women together. When Jemima hears that Maria's child was torn from her breast, "the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions", and she is redeemed through feeling (p. 80).

The feeling Wollstonecraft advocates is not the usual feminine sensibility of novels, which can so conveniently be reconciled with conventional morality. Wollstonecraft makes a distinction between active and passive sensibility, and recommends the former. Women who, in accordance with the precepts of many a conservative novelist of the time, marry with-

out experiencing sexual desire, "may possess tenderness; but they want that fire of the imagination, which produces active sensibility, and positive virtue" (p. 153). In fact, the criticism she makes of the sentimental virtues praised in women is that they deny feeling, not that they indulge it. Sentiment is used to suppress the sexual feelings that would lead a woman to desert a husband like Venables, and "woman . . . is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate" (p. 154).

True feeling, unlike sentimental weakness, Wollstonecraft suggests, leads to rebellion against injustice. This is seen in the judge's speech in the trial scene.

The judge . . . alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and the new-fangled notions which incroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life -- and, if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality. What virtuous woman thought of her feelings? (pp. 198-199).

He is a spokesman for the reaction against revolution in the later 1790s, and links the revolutionary principles of the French with sexual immorality. His conclusion, "What virtuous woman thought of her feelings?", reveals that the popular image of women as the more feeling sex -- an image still used by conservative rationalists -- is a cover for the suppression of all those feelings which do not lead to self-sacrifice.

In the 1790s "the English progressive novelist speaks resolutely to the Reason",¹ but Wollstonecraft does not. It is because she does not that she writes a better feminist novel than a rationalist revolutionary like Holcroft. His Anna St. Ives

¹Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas p. 33.

(1792), is a product of the early, optimistic phase of the English revolutionaries, and has been called "the most completely Jacobinical of all the English Jacobin novels".¹ The heroine is a model of strength and reason, who proves that the powers of mind and truth will prevail. The conflict between her love for Frank Henley, and her desire to reform Coke Clifton by marrying him, allows scope for an analysis of the feminist's problems of feeling and reason. Women's feelings, however, are not dealt with adequately, and the reconciliation of feeling and reason in Anna's marriage to Frank is rather facile. The Wrongs of Woman, though it presents a much less "advanced" woman than the heroine of Anna St. Ives, is a more radical book. The problems of women's feelings are not solved, but they are faced. Maria writes:

born a woman -- and born to suffer, in endeavouring to repress my own emotions, I feel more acutely the various ills my sex are fated to bear -- I feel that the evils they are subject to endure, degrade them so far below their oppressors, as almost to justify their tyranny; leading at the same time superficial reasoners to term that weakness the cause, which is only the consequence of short-sighted despotism (p. 181).

Less exhilarating, perhaps, than Anna St. Ives springing over a wall which she has been told "no woman could climb".² Wollstonecraft, however, provides an important analysis of women's position, because she confronts in all their complexity the psychological barriers to women's emancipation.

The Wrongs of Woman certainly proves Wollstonecraft an exception to the revolutionary novelists who "refused to exploit sexual passion as a powerful natural ally against a moribund society and its repressive conventions".³ If the Jacobin

¹Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 119.

²Anna St. Ives ed. Peter Faulkner (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 464.

³Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, pp. 44-5.

novelist's "flight from the irrational represents . . . an intellectual failure",¹ Wollstonecraft's depiction of the irrational in her heroine surely distinguishes her among her radical contemporaries for a greater clarity of vision.

Other progressive novelists of the 1790s, such as Elizabeth Inchbald and Mary Hays, illustrate the radicals' tendency to appear like conservative moralists in their rationalism, and as a result, their novels cannot offer such a moving account of women's wrongs as Wollstonecraft's does. In A Simple Story Inchbald creates a beautifully realized fictional world, in which Miss Milner's feelings for her guardian, Dorriforth the priest, are portrayed. It is certainly a more accomplished novel than The Wrongs of Woman. Miss Milner's defects are due to her boarding school education, which has taught her vanity, frivolity, and superficial accomplishments. Miss Milner tries to exercise a coquette's power over Dorriforth, and deliberately misbehaves in order to force him to love her in spite of her faults. After her marriage to the ex-priest, now Lord Elmwood, her frivolity eventually arouses his latent severity. Frivolity leads to worse crimes, and Lady Elmwood drifts into adultery. Her husband rejects her and their young daughter. The second half of the story concerns this daughter, who is eventually reconciled to her father. The younger heroine's fortitude, produced by an education in self-control, makes her a contrast to her mother. The moral is that a "PROPER EDUCATION" is necessary to combat female weakness.² This is typical 1790s feminism, as found in the Rights of Woman, and Gary Kelly makes a case for A Simple Story as a Jacobin novel because of its concern with education.³

¹Butler, p. 55.

²A Simple Story ed. J.M.S. Tompkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 338.

³See The English Jacobin Novel, pp. 71-4.

However, the unacceptable boldness of The Wrongs of Woman takes eighteenth-century feminism much further.

In Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Mary Hays applies feminist ideas to the question of a woman's response to the discovery of her own sexual feelings. Deploing the convention that female modesty must remain silent and reserved, she has her heroine declare her love for the hero. Here is a theme much bolder than that of A Simple Story. However, Hays, whether her intention is to placate conventional morality or to adopt the rationalist stance of the radicals, presents her heroine as a warning, who illustrates the necessity of controlling emotion. In her preface she writes, "the result of [the heroine's] hazardous experiment is calculated to operate as a warning, rather than as an example".¹ There remain some passionate denunciations of the poor education and condescension meted out to women, and there is an interesting feminist defence of womanly weakness, in reply to a well-meaning man who advises Emma to be more rational. Emma surely voices the self-doubts of other 1790s feminists, including Wollstonecraft, when she declares, "I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine -- but a woman, to whom education has given a sexual character. It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my oppressed sex; yet . . . I have still many female foibles . . . that unfit me for rising to arduous heights" (Emma Courtney, II, 53).

In The Victim of Prejudice (1799), Hays, influenced by Wollstonecraft's second novel, makes a radical critique of society's injustices to women. She blames on society's prejudices the downfall of the heroine's mother, who becomes a prostitute and is eventually executed for her part in a fatal brawl. Though accused of exciting "the contagious and consuming fever of perverted sensibility",² Hays actually advocates reason

¹Memoirs of Emma Courtney, I, 8.

²Critical Review n.s. 26 (1799), 451.

as the only chance for freedom. The dying mother asks a friend to look after her daughter, and to "cultivate her reason, make her feel her nature's worth, strengthen her faculties, inure her to suffer hardship, rouse her to independence, inspire her with fortitude, with energy, with self-respect, and teach her to condemn the tyranny that would impose fetters of sex upon mind".¹ Though Mary, the daughter, learns to control her passions with her reason, prejudice and persecution give her an unhappy life and an early death. The novel is of interest because of its argument that fortitude will not save women from misery in a bigoted, male-dominated, and unequal society. It does not have, however, the peculiar strength of The Wrongs of Woman, the exploration of the potential for both strength and weakness in womanly feeling.

Is the emphasis on feeling in The Wrongs of Woman merely evidence that Wollstonecraft "turned away from the failed Revolution and escaped through the romance of sympathy", as Kelly claims all women Jacobin novelists did?² I believe not. While sympathy is the quality most praised in the novel, and leads literally to Maria's escape, The Wrongs of Woman can be defended from the charge of escapism implied here. The endings of most radical novels of the 1790s, by men and by women, are more escapist than Wollstonecraft's second novel. In Inchbald's Nature and Art, and Smith's The Young Philosopher, the main characters escape to America, ostensibly to join a brave new society, but really, judging by glimpses we have of their subsequent lives, to retreat into a small domestic circle. Hermesprong and Hugh Trevor are resolved by the hero's acquisition of money or a title. Caleb Williams is one great exception to

¹The Victim of Prejudice, I, 167; quoted in Critical Review n.s. 26 (1799), 451.

²The English Jacobin Novel, p. 112.

this tendency to escapism, and The Wrongs of Woman, if it had been completed, would, I believe, have been another. The projected ending in which Maria decides to live for her daughter suggests a difficult life for them both in the society which has condemned Maria.

It is possible to see this ending as Wollstonecraft's abandonment of the idea of personal fulfilment for women. Both Margaret Walters and Gary Kelly see both projected endings, the suicide and the decision to live, as pessimistic. Walters considers that the two endings "seem to sum up [Wollstonecraft's] deepest fears about women,"¹ while Kelly, after describing the two possible endings, comments "[p]erhaps revision would have purged this residue of Mary and the dark days of 1795" (Introduction to Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, p. xix). A less autobiographical approach to a novel too often seen solely in terms of its correspondences with its author's life, would result in more consideration being given to Jemima's part in the second projected ending. This wholly unautobiographical character provides the hint, in this fragment, of a positive resolution to the novel. If we consider the final scene from Jemima's point of view, we see the woman who once drove a pregnant woman to suicide rescuing another woman from suicide by restoring to her her girl-child, the symbol of both hopes and fears for woman's future condition. This scene of regeneration deserves a more positive name than either escapism or despair.

The Wrongs of Woman analyses many different aspects of feeling, and unlike many contemporary radical novels, gives full weight to its positive as well as its negative implications. Considering the crucial part played by the growing feeling between Maria and Jemima, it is hard to agree with Kelly's

¹Walters, p. 329.

estimation that "faced with the problem of imagining a solution to the 'wrongs of woman', Mary Wollstonecraft, like . . . her female contemporaries, could only fall back on the masculine virtue traditionally recommended for women, the resolution of 'fortitude'" (Introduction, p. xx). He is nearer the truth when he describes the novel's message as a "radical philosophy of revolution through those very qualities which have enslaved women since time began" (Introduction, p. xviii). In her Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, Wollstonecraft begins to integrate feeling and reason in her feminist vision. She writes, "most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex: we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel".¹ The Wrongs of Woman is the fruit of this deep reason and strong feeling, and it is her exploration of the difficult connection between the two that makes her second novel the most profound fictional treatment of feminism produced in her time.

¹Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, ed. Carol H. Poston (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 160.

CHAPTER 11

CHARLOTTE SMITH

From their opposite political stances, Jane West and Mary Wollstonecraft both reject the conventional sentimental heroine. Their works demonstrate the strong attack on sentimental ideas in the 1790s, but not all novelists joined this attack. Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) deserves special attention in this context. Her response to the questions about the sentimental heroine raised in the 1790s was thoughtful and original. As her political sympathies were with the radicals, and she was an admirer of Wollstonecraft, she had criticisms to make of the established ideal of womanhood. However, she never entirely rejected the sentimental heroine, and her novels contain interesting attempts to incorporate new ideas about women into the sentimental novel.

Smith's novels, Emmeline (1788), Ethelinde (1789), Celestina (1791), Desmond (1792), The Old Manor House (1793), The Wanderings of Warwick (1794), The Banished Man (1794), Montalbert (1795), Marchmont (1796), and The Young Philosopher (1798), draw on a variety of literary traditions. They are novels of sentiment with debts to Richardson and to many of the female sentimentalists of the late eighteenth century. French sentimental writers, particularly Prévost and D'Arnaud, influenced her.¹ Smith's novels contain some Gothic elements. They also bear some resemblance to Fanny Burney's comedies of manners, especially Cecilia. Another influence, noticeable in Smith's later work, is that of the radical novel of purpose as written by Bage, Holcroft and Wollstonecraft. Charlotte Smith's wide scope means that her

¹For a discussion of French influence on Smith, see J.R. Foster, "Charlotte Smith, Pre-Romantic Novelist", PMLA 43 (1928), 463-475.

fiction presents us with different types of heroine, and various attitudes to the sentimental idealization of womanhood.

Smith's early novels, more than the later ones, show the influence of the sentimental tradition. Her first heroine, Emmeline, is a typical sentimental heroine:

Her figure was elegant and graceful; somewhat exceeding the middling height. Her eyes were blue; and her hair brown. Her features not very regular; yet there was a sweetness in her countenance, when she smiled, more charming than the effect of the most regular features could have given. Her countenance, open and ingenuous, expressed every emotion of her mind¹. . .

Irregular features made lovely by a sweet expression are commonly found in sentimental heroines, who thus demonstrate the superiority of sensibility to beauty. It is equally commonplace that the heroine's countenance reveals her emotions. Like other heroines, Emmeline pities the unfortunate, and shows "the compassion as well as the beauty of an angel" (*Emmeline*, p. 5). Ethelinde and Celestina, Smith's next two heroines, are products of the same tradition. Ethelinde is naturally pensive, tending towards melancholy, and finds that her acute sensibility causes her pain. She also has a strong sense of duty and prudence, which makes her refuse to engage herself to Montgomery, the man she loves, while their poverty makes their marriage imprudent. Celestina falls in love with Willoughby, but advises him to marry his cousin in accordance with his mother's wishes, because, "however soft her heart, her reason was equal to the task of checking a dangerous or guilty indulgence of [her] sensibility".² Thus Smith, like other sentimental novelists, makes her heroines' sensibility compatible with eighteenth-century morality.

¹*Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* ed. A.H. Ehrenpreis, p. 5.
²*Celestina, A Novel* 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1791), I, 111.

Charlotte Smith's early heroines represent her interpretation of the eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood. Another representative of ideal womanhood found in her novels is an older woman. Mrs. Stafford in Emmeline is typical. She endures the unkind and foolish behaviour of her husband, and is a tender mother to her children. She befriends Emmeline and helps and advises her in her difficulties. Smith was criticized for this portrait, which is clearly a favourable self-portrait based on her own matrimonial experiences.¹ The older woman is important to her, however, not merely as an excuse for dwelling on her personal life, but as a way of broadening the concept of the heroine. This is especially so, as we shall see later, in her last novel, The Young Philosopher. Smith's ideal women are usually surrounded by other female characters who help define ideal womanhood by contrast. In Ethelinde, the heroine's gentleness and kindness are contrasted to the selfishness of Sir Edward Newenden's fashionable wife. Ethelinde's true sensibility is highlighted by the affected sensibility of Clarinthia Ludford, and her femininity is contrasted to the rough masculinity of Miss Newenden. Charlotte Smith's creation of heroines of sensibility and delicacy, who are contrasted to less estimable women without these qualities, shows her adherence to late-eighteenth-century standards of ideal womanhood.

Although Smith's first three heroines are clearly drawn from the sentimental tradition, they have some new, distinguishing characteristics. Intelligence is common in sentimental heroines, but Smith emphasizes this more than most novelists. Emmeline, brought up in a remote Pembrokeshire castle, has only a poorly-educated housekeeper and a steward to teach her, but "her uncommon

¹See F.M.A. Hilbish, Charlotte Smith, poet and novelist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1941), pp. 123-126.

understanding, and unwearied application" has "supplied the deficiency of her instructors, and conquered the disadvantages of her situation" (Emmeline, p. 2). Fortitude is another quality emphasized by Smith. Emmeline faces sorrow courageously, showing "native firmness in a degree very unusual to her age and sex" (p. 6). A distinctive feature in Smith's heroines is their love of nature and sublime scenery. As a young girl, Emmeline "delighted to wander among the rocks that formed the bold and magnificent boundary of the ocean . . . she often rambled several miles into the country, visiting the remote huts of the shepherds, among the wildest mountains" (p. 4). Ethelinde and Celestina are equally endowed with intelligence and fortitude, and both show their sensibility and taste by their appreciation of romantic scenery.

Emmeline, Ethelinde and Celestina establish a certain pattern for the sentimental heroine. Charlotte Smith's early novels were well-received and widely-read, and they helped to form the popular idea of the sentimental heroine in the 1790s. Ann Radcliffe shows the influence of Charlotte Smith's early novels by portraying her own heroines as artistic women whose accomplishments are the result of natural sensibility. When Jane Austen satirizes the naturally-refined, all-accomplished heroine in the opening chapter of Northanger Abbey, she chooses Emmeline as the model heroine of whom Catherine Morland is a burlesque version.¹

The sentimental heroine is not Charlotte Smith's only interest, however, and she tends to clash with some of the other interests expressed in her novels. In contrast to the heroine, many of the minor characters are comically or satirically treated.

¹See Mary Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 60, and A.H. Ehrenpreis, Introduction to Emmeline, pp. xi-xii.

The strength of The Old Manor House, for example, often considered her best novel, is in the comedy generated by the "gallery of portraits, of which it would not be difficult to find the originals in real life".¹ As a creator of comic character Smith can be compared to Fanny Burney, but unlike Burney's, Smith's satire is linked to a radical view of the contemporary political scene. In Desmond, for example, the effete, ridiculous Lord Newminster, who dotes on his pet dog, is a worthless nobleman who refuses to help his dependents, and whose opposition to the French Revolution operates as an argument in its favour.² Other comic characters are used in a similar way.

Many of Smith's novels contain political argument. There is a change of opinion between Desmond, written early in the revolutionary period, and The Banished Man, written after the Reign of Terror. In The Banished Man the hero is an exiled French aristocrat, and the harm caused by the revolution is emphasized. In Marchmont and The Young Philosopher sympathy for radical ideas returns. Even in The Banished Man the Revolution is described as a "glorious attempt" which went wrong.³ As a sympathizer with radical ideas, Charlotte Smith holds unconventional ideas about women. In Desmond there is a defence of women's right to take an interest in, and to write about, politics. (See Preface, I, iii). Some of her other novels also question woman's conventional role. Smith's political interests and beliefs, then, clash with her portrayal of conventional sentimental heroines.

Smith's sentimental heroines also clash with the generally

¹Analytical Review 16 (1793), 61.

²Desmond, I, 57-61.

³The Banished Man (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1794), III, 92.

anti-sentimental climate of late-eighteenth-century criticism. The Critical Review had these criticisms to make of Ethelinde:

Of the characters, Ethelinde herself, though amiable and interesting, is of less importance than some others. It has been said of Shakespeare, that his females, when most amiable, have only a tender affectionate softness. This is the character of Ethelinde; and, though she at times displays a little heroism, it is the impulse only of love which seems to have occupied her whole soul.¹

Smith's novels were a convenient focus for anti-sentimental critics, who were able to point to her minor comic characters as more interesting creations than her sentimental heroes and heroines. "The hero and heroine must be of course faultless; and the delicacy of the drawing, the skill in distinguishing the minuter features of the mind, are generally displayed in the subordinate characters", wrote the Critical reviewer of Celestina.

While the comic characters were preferred by many reviewers, Smith believed that her readers wanted sentiment. The Banished Man contains a discussion of love which can be seen as an ironical reply to her critics. The first volume of the novel, dealing with D'Alonville's adventures at the time of the Revolution, has no love-interest. At the beginning of the second volume, the author explains:

I have been assailed with remonstrances on the evil tendency of having too much of love -- too much of violent attachments in my novels; and as I thought in the present instance, the situation of my hero was of itself interesting enough to enable me to carry him on for some time without making him violently in love, I was determined to try the experiment (The Banished Man, II, viii).

The experiment does not last much longer, however, and soon Angelina, an uninteresting paragon of youthful innocence and

¹Critical Review n.s. 3 (1791), 57.

²Critical Review n.s. 3 (1791), 319.

virtue, is introduced as the heroine. Smith includes the heroine and the love-story to satisfy the demands of sentimental readers. She puts protests to this effect into the mouth of one of her characters, Mrs. Denzil, an impoverished authoress, like Smith herself, forced to write unrealistic tales of love to support her children (See II, 225-30). Smith's own interests, as well as those of her reviewers, may lie in comedy and satire, but the readers buying her novels demand sentiment.

The gap between Smith's interests in comedy and in social and political comment, and in her popular readership's demands for sentiment, has been seen as a major problem in her writing. Katharine Rogers describes Smith as a victim of the pattern set by the "feminine" novel. This pattern, she argues, was useful to some women writers, but degenerated "from a model to a set of constrictions. Once an area of "women's material" was established, they were expected to stay within it". Charlotte Smith follows the pattern "without conviction, so that most of her novels nominally center on an insipid heroine, and we must look for interest and realistic life in peripheral areas."¹ Rogers cites Smith's desire to write a novel without love in it, expressed in The Banished Man, and her dislike of the conventional sentimental heroine, expressed in Marchmont, as evidence that she disliked the sentimental, "feminine" novel expected from her.

Rogers' description of the expectations of sentiment from women writers is convincing. It may be objected that the criticisms of Smith's heroines already quoted show that many reviewers preferred her comic and satiric to her "feminine" sentimental writing. However, Smith's comic characters are not

¹"Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists: Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith", Eighteenth-Century Studies 11 (1977-8), 64 and 68.

well received when they are portrayed in what the reviewers consider an unfeminine manner. One reviewer of The Banished Man writes:

though we are frequently much pleased with Mrs. Smith's drawings, we think some of them not altogether fit subjects for a lady-artist; as Mr. Lemuel Paunceford for instance. We admit that the figure is a good one; but when we recollect that a lady writes, a certain sensation arises in our minds, and strikes out the dimple of mirth, in spite of all the complaisance we can muster.¹

Urged to use a "feminine" mode of writing which her critics nevertheless consider inferior to more "masculine" comedy and satire, Smith is the victim of a critical double standard.

Rogers is right to find weaknesses in Smith's sentimental writing. It is the sentimental heroines who are at the centre of a complex of problems for the writer. They are essential to the plots of her popular sentimental novels, but are often inconsistent with Smith's comic and satiric purpose. The conflict between comic and sentimental in Smith's work sometimes leads to technical difficulties. Fanny Burney approaches a similar dilemma in her work by making her sentimental heroine into a comic character, whose naivety causes amusement and whose shortcomings can be the subjects of the author's criticism. Charlotte Smith's heroines are sometimes given this treatment, but the effect of this is to unbalance her sentimental tone.

In Emmeline, for example, which draws on Burney's Cecilia, the heroine is intended, unlike Burney's, to represent ideal young womanhood. When Emmeline comes into contact with minor characters whom Smith portrays satirically, an uneasy tone is produced. For example, after the death of the housekeeper who has mothered Emmeline, the heroine meets her guardian, the rich and proud Lord Montreville. He begins the conversation:

¹European Magazine 26 (1794), 276.

'I was sorry, Miss Mowbray, to hear of the death of old Carey.'

The tears started into the eyes of Emmeline.

'She was an excellent servant, and served the family faithfully many years.'

Poor Emmeline felt the tears fall on her bosom.

'But however she was old; and had been, I suppose, long infirm. I hope the person who now fills her place has supplied it to your satisfaction?'

'Ye-s, yes, my lord;' inarticulately sobbed Emmeline, quite overcome by the mention of her old friend (Emmeline, p. 18).

Lord Montreville's "excellent servant" is Emmeline's "old friend", and the superiority of her sensibility is demonstrated. However, the reader gets the impression that the tender heroine, as well as the unfeeling guardian, is the butt of satire in this passage. The comic progression of her emotion, which reaches a new stage of expression after every remark of Lord Montreville's, effectively distances her from the reader. In many other scenes, the reader is invited to share Emmeline's emotion, but here, her conversation with a comic character has turned her momentarily into a comic character too.

The use of the sentimental heroine causes ideological as well as technical problems for Smith's writing. Smith's support for radical ideas finds appropriate expression in her satirical writing. Aristocrats proud of their lineage, and rich people who refuse to help their poor relations are frequently the targets of her criticism. Smith's sentimental plots and heroines do not go so well with her political ideas. The conventional sentimental heroine supports an aristocratic view of society in many ways. Emmeline is an example of this. Brought up to believe that she is the illegitimate daughter of Lord Montreville's elder brother, she eventually discovers that her birth was legitimate and she is the rightful heiress of her father's estate. Emmeline's possession of superior abilities is a conventional indication that her true social status is above

her apparent one. This, and her possession of innate virtues, are in disharmony with contemporary radicals' attacks on the concept of natural superiority.

The ideological problem posed by Smith's idealized sentimental heroine is even more in evidence when we consider her relation to late-eighteenth-century feminism. Anti-sentimental critics, as we have seen, thought Smith's heroines too occupied with love. The Analytical Review makes similar criticisms of Smith's early heroines from a feminist point of view. The Analytical reviewer of Smith's second novel, probably Mary Wollstonecraft, filled much of the review with complaints about the character of Ethelinde:

The heroine is too often sick, and rather inspires love than respect. Though we are told, in express words, that she is all perfection -- nature's masterpiece -- she appears a frail woman . . . we cannot help wishing that Mrs. S had considered how many females might probably read her pleasing production, whose minds are in a ductile state; she would not then have cherished their delicacy, or, more properly speaking, weakness, by making her heroine so very beautiful, and so attentive to her personal charms,¹ even when grief, beauty's cankerworm, was at work.¹

The equation of feminine delicacy with weakness, the objection to idealizations of sick or frail women, and the dislike of emphasis on female beauty are typical feminist attitudes in the late eighteenth century. By creating a heroine in the sentimental tradition Smith leaves her novel open to attack from those who criticize the eighteenth-century feminine ideal on feminist grounds.

This criticism would not have mattered to an author intent

¹Analytical Review 5 (1789), 485. This review is unsigned, and followed by four reviews of novels, all unsigned but the last, which is initialled with Wollstonecraft's 'M'. Internal evidence, including the presence of feminist argument, the contempt expressed for "the sounding distinctions of rank, and the gay delights which riches afford", and the complaint that "there is very little passion in the tale" (484), suggests to me that this review can be attributed to Wollstonecraft.

on upholding the eighteenth-century ideal of femininity, but it is important to a writer like Charlotte Smith, who intends to support feminist argument in her novels. In *Ethelinde*, Smith means to portray a woman whose intelligence is a drawback in the eyes of Davenant, her conceited, stupid suitor, because he is afraid of marrying a woman superior to himself.¹ Emmeline is also an intelligent woman who constitutes a threat to over-developed male egos. When Sir Richard Crofts uses threats to try and force Emmeline to agree to marry Mr. Rochely, her "strength of mind, and dignity of manner" astonish him, and he is mortified to find "that his masculine eloquence, on which he was accustomed to pride himself, and which he thought generally unanswerable, had so entirely fallen short of the effect he expected" (*Emmeline*, p. 110). Charlotte Smith's early heroines are intended as sentimental yet feminist heroines, and criticism of them from a feminist point of view reveals the contradictory nature of the elements Smith is attempting to combine.

While the sentimental plot and the sentimental heroine certainly cause problems for Smith's novels, their influence on her work should not be considered wholly negative. Katharine Rogers suggests that Smith disliked sentimental heroines altogether and created them only because her financial needs "forced her to attend to what was acceptable in ladies' fiction", with the result that her central characters are insipid creations.² This analysis, I suggest, is misleading in two ways.

Firstly, Smith does not use the sentimental heroine entirely without enthusiasm. In her early novels, as we have seen, she establishes a new kind of sentimental heroine, whose artistic

¹*Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (London: T. Cadell, 1789), I, 206.

²Rogers, "Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists", p. 72.

abilities and appreciation of sublime scenery are especially important. This heroine may cause problems for the author in her treatment of political themes, but is of great use to the development of another theme in the novels. The landscape descriptions which figure largely in the novels gain much of their distinctive tone from their association with the heroine's feelings. Natural objects both reflect and soothe Emmeline's anxiety when her future seems uncertain.

Emmeline went down to the sea side, and seating herself on a fragment of rock, fixed her eyes insensibly on the restless waves that broke at her feet. The low murmurs of the tide retiring on the sands; the sighing of the wind among the rocks which hung over her head, clothed with long grass and marine plants; the noise of the sea fowl going to their nests among the cliffs; threw her into a profound reverie. (Emmeline, p. 16).

When Emmeline has to leave Mowbray Castle, the home of her childhood, the beautiful landscape through which she passes is in sympathy with her own melancholy mood: "a rich and beautiful vale, now variegated with the mellowed tints of the declining year, spread its enclosures, 'till it was lost again among the blue and barren hills" (p. 37). Charlotte Smith brings an elegiac mood from her poetry, for which she was known before she began to write fiction, into her novels. Her use of the sentimental heroine enables her to do so successfully. Through her, the novelist can express her sense of the link between nature's moods and human sensibilities.

Secondly, it is misleading to see Smith as a victim of the literary conventions of her day. It is true that she grows increasingly dissatisfied with the sentimental heroine, and that the clash between the sentimental plot and social and political satire leads to unevenness of tone and means that sometimes Smith's "gifts for humor, characterization, and satire [are]

dissociated from the main plots of her novels".¹ However, it is also true that Smith is an inventive novelist, willing to experiment with the conventions of the novel in an attempt to harmonize the various elements in her work. Smith's strength as an innovatory novelist can easily be overlooked, because the additions she made to the sentimental plot have become familiar, especially through Ann Radcliffe's work. In Emmeline, however, she surprised readers by marrying her heroine not to her first suitor, the romantic and impetuous Delamere, to whom she becomes engaged half-way through the novel, but to Godolphin, who appears later on. Scott testifies to the disappointment he felt at this twist in the plot, while A.H. Ehrenpreis suggests that it was "an exhilarating novelty" to some readers.² Smith, then, is aware of the restrictions in the pattern of the women's sentimental novel, and changes the pattern in a search for alternatives to stock characters and stock situations. Emmeline and The Old Manor House, the novels by which she is usually known today, have sentimental heroines who embody eighteenth-century ideals of womanhood. In some of Smith's less well-known novels, the heroines are created with different aims. In her attempts to write a radical and feminist novel without completely rejecting the sentimental tradition, she creates interesting new variants on the sentimental heroine.

One of Smith's problems, already mentioned, is the support given to an aristocratic world view by the conventional sentimental plot in which the heroine is discovered to be a nobleman's daughter or a rich heiress. In The Old Manor House Smith re-arranges this conventional plot in order to underline her own

¹Rogers, "Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists", 78.

²Scott, "Charlotte Smith", in Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction, pp. 184-5; and Ehrenpreis, Introduction to Emmeline, p. x.

democratic views. The heroine, Monimia, is in the obscure position usual to heroines. She is the great-niece of Mrs. Lennard, housekeeper to Mrs. Rayland, the proud old woman who owns Rayland Hall. There is a hint that Monimia may be connected to nobility. Mrs. Lennard's sister was married to a nobleman's chaplain, and there was a rumour that her daughter, who became Monimia's mother, was the illegitimate child of the nobleman. Having explained the heroine's origins in detail, the author adds:

Such at least was the history given in Mrs. Rayland's family of an infant girl, which at about four years old had been by the permission of her patroness taken, as it was said, from nurse, at a distant part of the county, and received by Mrs. Lennard at Rayland Hall
 . . .¹

The reservations in this passage suggest that there is some mystery connected with Monimia. She is treated as a servant, and "dressed like a parish girl, or in a way very little superior" (p. 14), but nothing can conceal her beauty and grace. It seems that she will turn out to be another heiress of noble birth reduced to humble status for the duration of a novel. Expectations of a familiar plot are aroused.

These expectations are disappointed. No long-lost relative appears, no-one gives Monimia a fortune, and her marriage to the hero, Orlando, begins in poverty. The Critical Review registered its disappointment:

We were in expectation, that, as an apology for Orlando's misplaced affection . . . the heroine of the piece would have turned out a very different personage -- but no; she still remains the obscure niece of Mrs. Lennard, and Orlando's conduct is, of course, held up as an example for all young gentlemen of family and

¹The Old Manor House ed. A.H. Ehrenpreis (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 12.

fortune to marry any pretty servant maid they chuse.¹

Though this review exaggerates Smith's democratic intentions -- Monimia is of genteel origin and is wrongly treated as a servant at Rayland Hall -- it is correct in discerning a political motive behind Smith's disruption of conventional patterns. The Old Manor House begins with a satire on the Rayland sisters' pride of ancestry, which has caused the poverty of their relatives, the Somerives. Various of their ancestors having married partners of a lower social class, the Somerives have had their blood "debased by the alloy of unworthy alliances", and are slighted by their rich relations (The Old Manor House, p. 4). It is fitting that Orlando Somerive should follow his father and grandfather in marrying a woman of neither family nor fortune, with "nothing to recommend her but beauty, simplicity and goodness" (p. 4). Monimia's beauty and virtue are not the results of an unacknowledged aristocratic lineage, but the qualities of "the obscure niece of Mrs. Lennard". Social satire is successfully linked to the plot in this novel.

As a democratic sentimental heroine, Monimia is cleverly managed. As a feminist heroine she is no match for the aristocrat Emmeline. She has no particular talents, no virtues beyond innocence and gentleness, and the author's attitude to her is one of affectionate condescension. Smith's heroines tend to be weak when the hero is made the centre of attention, as Orlando is in The Old Manor House. When it is through the hero's mind that we experience the events of the novel, and the hero whose sensibility represents the author's, the sentimental heroine loses her function for Charlotte Smith. She becomes merely an

¹Critical Review n.s. 8 (1793), 52.

innocent young woman, and Smith makes it clear from her earliest novels that something more is needed for heroism. "Few girls of her age, for Ethelinde was not yet eighteen, can be said to have any decided character at all; but the circumstances of her life had taught her to think and to feel", she writes of her second heroine (Ethelinde, I, 8). Here is an indication of Smith's movement away from the ideal of the sentimental heroine. She implies that the conventional heroine is uninteresting, and, in line with radical thinkers, stresses circumstance as a former of character. In her later novels, Smith attempts to create a new kind of heroine based on these ideas.

In Montalbert Smith expresses dissatisfaction with the conventions governing the heroine and defends her decision to portray a heroine capable of acting rashly and foolishly. Rosalie has faults "which, in an imaginary heroine, we may at once blame and pity, without finding the interest we take in her story weakened".¹ In Marchmont, there is a discussion of the problems of creating heroines, and Smith attempts to create a new, stronger heroine in Althea. Heroines are usually uninteresting, claims Smith, because they are inexperienced young women. Circumstance, not nature, produces the character of a heroine:

Other virtues than gentleness, pity, filial obedience, or faithful attachment, hardly belong to the sex, and are certainly called forth only by unusual occurrences. Such was undoubtedly the lot of Althea, and they formed her character; for in the hard school of adversity she acquired that fortitude and strength of mind which gave energy to an understanding, naturally of the first class.²

Fortitude is a quality attributed to Smith's earliest heroine, but in Marchmont it is made the basis of the heroine's character.

¹Montalbert: A Novel (London: S.Low, 1795), I, 177.

²Marchmont (London: Sampson Low, 1796), I, 178-9.

Reason is Althea's guide, and it leads her to become a critic of society. She reflects on the unjust differences between rich and poor, which mean that a labourer cannot earn enough even for the necessities of life (See Marchmont, III, 61-64). She protests about the position of women in society. Criticism of Mrs. Eversley, who torments her husband, is turned into reflection on the greater power that a husband has to torment his wife. Althea realises that had she married a husband of Mrs. Eversley's disposition, then "privileged by his sex, he might have dissipated my fortune and his own, and possibly have beat me, or locked me up, or sold me . . . Such people have existed -- do probably exist now" (IV, 279-80). Althea, bold enough and with sufficient political awareness to criticize injustices in the terms of radical thinkers of the 1790s, is a new kind of heroine.

Charlotte Smith has not enough confidence in Althea's popularity, however, to portray her character consistently. "How difficult . . . is it for a novelist to give to one of his heroines any very marked feature which shall not disfigure her!" she remarks, evidently afraid that her strong heroine will be disliked (I, 178). In her attempt to ensure that Althea's unorthodoxy does not prevent her from being an ideal heroine, Smith introduces some strange contradictions. When Marchmont is in hiding, Althea visits him, unbecoming behaviour for an eighteenth-century young woman. The author explains that:

With that timid deference to the opinion of the world, which is an amiable feature in the character of a young woman, Althea had also that strength of mind that enabled her to be decided when her understanding and conscience told her she was right (II, 150).

Again, on Althea's agreeing to meet Marchmont before he flees to France, Smith comments:

Though no one could be less disposed to that daring violation of the common rules of society, which sets at defiance the opinion of the world, yet she saw not why she should so far enslave herself to a narrow prejudice, as to deny that friendship to a worthy object, only because he was a young man (II, 190).

Smith tries to maintain the conventional heroine's "timid deference" in unconventional Althea, by dividing sentences about her into mutually contradictory halves. Althea's strange mixture of boldness and timidity is the result of Smith's attempt to combine attitudes typical of the radical writers of the 1790s with the popular ideal of the sentimental heroine.

Althea's inconsistency demonstrates the pitfalls of Smith's endeavour to reconcile sentimental and radical ideas about women. Smith was never completely to solve the problem of the heroine, as a study of her last novel, The Young Philosopher, shows. In this little-known but interesting work, Smith experiments further with the conventions of the novel, trying to create a heroine whose character can serve as an expression of her views on women and society. In this attempt, she divides the role and the characteristics of the heroine among three women, - an indication that she no longer finds it possible to present a simple model of womanly behaviour in the character of the sentimental heroine.

Martha Goldthorp, Medora, and Medora's mother, Mrs. Glenmorris are used in turn as the central female figure, as if each is being tested for qualities suited to a novel of radical and feminist ideas. Martha Goldthorp, lively and witty, is reminiscent of Maria Fluart in Bage's Hermsprong. She expresses dislike of feminine weakness and cowardice, and is contemptuous of her mercenary uncle and aunt. She meets attempts to control her with witty repartee, and is spirited in her refusal to be intimidated by her uncle, declaring:

I will tell you plainly once for all, that I will not be controuled in the most important concern of my life; I will not be wheedled or threatened into marrying your son . . . and if I am to be watched, and checked, and teased, as if I was still a baby in leading-strings, I must resolve . . . [to] establish myself in an house of my own.¹

It is a declaration of independence worthy of a feminist heroine.

However, there are many criticisms of Martha in the novel. She is a fashionable young woman, whose education has been merely the acquirement of "elegant accomplishments" (The Young Philosopher I, 137). Her self-satisfaction, caprice, and coquetry, are the "faults of an heiress" (I, 138). These comments suggest that Martha may be, not an idealized sentimental heroine, but a flawed heroine who may reform. The person to help her would be the hero, Delmont, the young philosopher. She falls in love with him, and, like Mary Hays' radical heroine Emma Courtney, identifies reticence about love with hypocrisy. She lets Delmont know of her feelings, and his opinion of her is raised "by that liberality of mind which has induced her to be sincere" (I, 261).

He refuses her, however. Though Martha's wit and rebelliousness make her similar to women who are sympathetically portrayed in radical novels of the 1790s, her faults are too serious for her to be redeemed. She is selfish, and guilty of false sensibility. Her voice is "modulated to the tenderest notes of grateful sensibility" as she speaks to the hero "in chosen and studied words" (I, 109). Measured against the standard of the sentimental heroine, whose sensibility is true and artless, Martha is found wanting, and the rejection of her shows that the ideal of the sentimental heroine still has some importance for Smith.

¹The Young Philosopher: A Novel (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), I, 210.

In contrast to Martha is Medora Glenmorris, who eventually marries the hero. She is innocent and ignorant, and is introduced in a suitably pastoral setting, gathering nuts in her cottage garden. Accosted by Mrs. Crewkherne, who believes she is Delmont's mistress, Medora replies "in a soft and musical voice, which however trembled with fear" (I, 185-6). After Mrs. Crewkherne's departure, Medora, "trembling and terrified at the fierce looks and menacing tone of the old lady, though she hardly comprehended the purport of what she uttered, was obliged to lean for a moment against a tree" (I, 188). With such weakness, befitting the heroine of the most extreme of sentimental novels, Medora would be insipid beside Martha. Significantly, the two never meet.

In the third volume, however, Medora is transformed, acquiring such a measure of reason and fortitude as to be almost unrecognisable as the character introduced in the first volume. In one episode she is abducted by an ineffectual villain, Darnell. She is witty at his expence and openly contemptuous of him. "Do you doubt that I treated as he deserved this contemptible miscreant?" she asks Delmont afterwards (IV, 219). Medora escapes from Darnell by climbing out of a window and down a vine. As she appears in the last two volumes, Medora is a rational heroine, fit mate for a revolutionist hero. She is Smith's attempt to create a radical heroine who still retains some of the sensibility of the idealized sentimental heroine.

Sensibility is even more important to the character of Medora's mother. Charlotte Smith criticizes Mrs. Glenmorris for her lack of fortitude, comparing her with her stronger daughter (Preface, I, vii). However, it is because of Mrs. Glenmorris's sensibility and vulnerability that she makes an effective alternative heroine. Smith makes older women important

characters in some of her earlier novels, but only in The Young Philosopher is the older woman's sensibility made central to the novel. Much of the action of the novel is seen from Mrs. Glenmorris's point of view. She fulfils one function of the heroine in the earlier works by acting as a focus for Smith's rendering of melancholy sensibility linked to descriptions of nature. While Medora is missing, Mrs. Glenmorris broods on the past:

[She] felt the air blow softly on her face, and listened to the sighing of the wind among the trembling leaves, such were the sensations, such the sounds she felt and heard at the beginning of summer, when Delmont and Medora were with her, . . . but fancy could not long delude her . . . she looked around her, but how different were the objects from those so dear to her heart (IV, 89-90).

Mrs. Glenmorris is, in effect, the heroine at the end of the novel, and can be seen as the representative of the author's feelings both personally and politically. Her reveries about her lost daughter perhaps express Smith's own sorrow for the loss of her favourite daughter, Anna Augusta, who died in 1795. Fulfilling the usual expectations of the sentimental novel, Smith returns Medora safe to her family, and Delmont and Medora marry, and are happy. However, an underlying sense of defeat is conveyed through the portrait of Mrs. Glenmorris, whose "mind long suffered from the shock she had sustained, and who could not hear some names without trembling" (IV, 395). The sentimental theme of her personal disillusionment and sorrow is closely tied to the political theme of the novel, disenchantment with the institutions of English society. She tells her husband, "let us not stay in [England] . . . to which we have both returned only to suffer; and where we know and have experienced that the poor may, in some cases at least, be persecuted and oppressed with impunity" (IV, 385). Personal and political pessimism are both

expressed by this unconventional heroine.

The Young Philosopher shows Charlotte Smith continuing to experiment with new ideas. Throughout her career she demonstrates her concern for improving characterization, especially of women, within the sentimental novel. Smith creates a wide variety of characters in her attempts to modify the idealized sentimental heroine to suit her radical and feminist message, without discarding the concept of sensibility. Though her work is uneven, she deserves to be recognised as one of the most thoughtful and inventive novelists to tackle the problems posed by the sentimental heroine at the end of the eighteenth century.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that women novelists in the late eighteenth century seek to express their ideas about women through their presentation of an ideal woman, who closely corresponds to the patterns of womanly behaviour recommended by traditional moralists, but cannot be entirely identified with them. We have traced the development of the ideal heroine, from her early manifestations in Sarah Fielding's work, through the greater sentimentalism of Frances Brooke's and Elizabeth Griffith's novels, and have indicated some of the ways in which she is developed later in the century, when sentimentalism is criticized and various revisions of the notion of ideal womanhood are offered by novelists.

By the end of the century, women writers dominate the novel tradition, and it can be seen that some of the features they establish as central to the novel -- the focus on the heroine, on domestic life, and on morality in relation to courtship and marriage -- remain an important part of the tradition in the nineteenth century.¹ While these concerns are usually traced to the influence of Richardson and Fanny Burney, the numerous minor women novelists of the late eighteenth century were influential in establishing them as central novelistic concerns.

The minor women novelists in this study, forgotten though many of them are, made their mark on the development of the novel, and on the work of major novelists like Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott. Jane Austen usually drew on the women's sentimental novel in order to mock it. Her early work,

¹Vineta Colby links the domestic concerns of the novel in the early nineteenth century with the importance of female writers and readers in Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 30-32.

including the juvenilia, and Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility, mocks literary conventions and sentimental attitudes common in the tradition of the women's novel. However, she learned from women writers before her, not only from Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, whose novels she praises in Northanger Abbey,¹ but little-remembered names like Charlotte Lennox and Charlotte Smith. The Female Quixote is praised in Austen's letters.² Charlotte Smith's sentimental heroines may call forth Austen's laughter, but there is praise of Smith's novels in "Catharine",³ and Austen may have learned more from Smith than is usually supposed. At her best, Smith has a detached, humorous tone rather like Austen's. As she describes visits to Rayland Hall, indicating the haughty grandeur of the hostess and gently mocking the reluctance of the guests, she creates a world of social comedy resembling Austen's:

But when the snow fell not, and the ways were passable; or when in summer no excuse was left, and the rheumatism of the elder, or the colds of the younger ladies could not be pleaded; the females of the family of Somerive were compelled to endure in all their terrific and tedious forms the grand dinners at the Hall (The Old Manor House, pp. 6-7).

Jane Austen may have learned some of her craft from passages like this. The influence of Lennox and Smith on her reminds us of a comic and satiric tradition in eighteenth-century women's novels, which should not be overlooked in assessing their sentimental aspects.

Women novelists also influenced Scott, who admired Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith.⁴ In his fiction are

¹See Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, p. 33.

²See Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 7 Jan 1807, in Jane Austen's Letters ed. R.W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 171.

³See Jane Austen, Minor Works, p. 199.

⁴See Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction, pp. 102-119. and pp. 184-190.

one or two details which seem to be drawn from his reading of Charlotte Smith. In Old Mortality, the hero, Morton, having been presumed dead, returns to Scotland to find that Edith Bellenden, whom he loves, is betrothed to Lord Evandale. The scene in which he overhears a conversation between them, and learns that she has not forgotten him, is similar to a scene in Ethelinde, where Montgomery, having been given up for lost, returns to overhear Sir Edward Newenden's proposal to Ethelinde.¹ This parallel between the novels also highlights the important difference between them. In Smith's novels the heroine and her love-story are central concerns, while in Scott's they are peripheral to the main concern of examining Scotland in conflict in the 1670s and 1680s. Charlotte Smith, though wishing to widen the scope of the sentimental novel, remains centrally concerned with the heroine, and attempts to alter and add interest to the established ideal of womanhood. Scott, adopting a similar ideal, is less concerned with it, and he does not make his heroine very interesting.

By adopting an ideal of womanhood without giving it the central importance and close scrutiny which a novelist like Charlotte Smith gives it, many novelists of the nineteenth century produced heroines who have been criticized as unrealistic and insipid.² While the idealization of women is attacked at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly by Mary Wollstonecraft, in the nineteenth century images of ideal womanhood are still found, and the Victorian ideal heroine, "the lovely imbecile", in Margaret Dalziel's words, can be seen to derive from the late-

¹See Old Mortality (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp. 355-370; and Ethelinde, V, 288-305.

²For example, see Françoise Basch, Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67, tr. Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen Lane, 1974), Introduction, pp. xiii-xiv.

eighteenth-century ideal.¹ Novelists like Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith present heroines who are much closer to the ideal of popular novelists in the nineteenth century than are the rebellious heroines of Mary Wollstonecraft's novels.

Most women novelists of the late eighteenth century intended to support their own sex, but as we have seen, the feminine ideal which they present does not always help them do so. The comparison between late-eighteenth-century heroines and their Victorian successors may help us form some conclusions on eighteenth-century achievements in the presentation of women. Jenni Calder finds Victorian sentimental heroines more limited than their eighteenth-century predecessors, because their sphere of action is narrower. With the exceptions of the novels of the Brontës and Elizabeth Gaskell, she writes, much fiction of the 1840s and 50s "contains not only a stereotype of femininity and marriage, but a stereotype that is intrinsically less interesting than, for instance, the Fanny Burney heroine hedged by dangers".² Popular fiction of the mid-Victorian age is conservative in its attitude to women,³ in contrast to the more progressive outlook of much late eighteenth-century popular fiction. For example, Victorian popular novels usually blame conflicts between husband and wife on the wife,⁴ whereas even one of the more didactic eighteenth-century novelists, like Clara Reeve, presents a more complex picture, and one with more feminist implications.

Perhaps one reason for these differences is that by the Victorian age, the idealized image of women, developed from the late-eighteenth-century ideal, is an outdated stereotype which

¹Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago (London: Cohen and West, 1957), p. 84.

²Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 56.

³See especially Dalziel, Ch. IX, 'The Heroine', pp. 84-98.

⁴See Dalziel, p. 119.

takes no account of the new roles women were beginning to adopt in society. The role of the woman writer as developed in the eighteenth century was also becoming an outdated convention in the nineteenth, and the Brontë sisters, who presented heroines not conforming to the Victorian ideal, were condemned as unwomanly.

The popular novelists of the late eighteenth century do not, like many Victorian popular novelists, present an image of womanhood which is out of touch with the realities of women's social position. In the late eighteenth century, the ideal heroine still reflects a new, in some respects enlightened, view of women, which is why Frances Brooke and Elizabeth Griffith can combine feminist arguments with a presentation of femininity that, a century later, would be used only by writers with a conservative view of women's role. For a short time, the developing ideal of femininity is compatible with progressive ideas about women's aptitudes and talents. The conservative implications of the ideal are revealed at the end of the century by Wollstonecraft and others, and in the nineteenth century, while this ideal continues to gain importance, it is no longer the vehicle for the expression of progressive ideas about women.

Allied to the question of how to evaluate the notion of ideal womanhood, is the question of how to evaluate the role of the woman writer. I have claimed that women novelists at this time established a certain moral tone for the novel. Despite the differences between them, the writers in this study share the hope of civilizing society by imposing on it what they see as feminine moral standards. The dominance of women novelists in the late eighteenth century, and their establishment of moral standards for the novel based on ideas of feminine decorum, did much to make the

¹See the discussion of "The Woman Writer" in Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), pp.1-48.

novel a morally respectable genre and to ensure that it remained so for better or worse, in the nineteenth century.

The didacticism which sometimes threatens to overwhelm the novels of some of these writers is an indication of the women novelists' mistrust of the power of fantasy in fiction. Instead of creating a world of idealized love, Jane West reduces the novel's power of fantasy, by creating homely settings for her moralizing tales about the dangers of romance. In warning against romantic love she strikes at the heart of the novel. In their different ways, Clara Reeve, Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith and Charlotte Lennox also question the convention of romantic love and the assumptions of fiction. This mistrust of fictional fantasy may also explain the strong element of didacticism in the work of some early nineteenth-century women novelists, such as Maria Edgeworth and Susan Ferrier. It was a commonplace that the novel's job was to instruct and entertain, but the woman novelist feared that the novel which entertained too well would fail to instruct, or rather, would teach female readers the wrong lessons, lessons of dependence on a fantastic notion of romantic love, or on fantasy itself. Thus the role of the early woman novelist was often that of the unsympathetic critic of the novel.

The part played by these women novelists, and their presentation of ideal femininity, can be assessed as either progressive or regressive. Lynne Agress sees women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as agents in the continued subordination of women, writing that they "reinforced the passive, inferior, feminine stereotype in their writings", and that "[r]ather than trying to change society, women novelists sought not only to maintain its values but even to make their readers conform to them".¹

¹The Feminine Irony: Women on Women in Early-Nineteenth-Century English Literature (London: Associated University Presses, 1978), p. 16 and p. 121.

While this is true of certain aspects of most of the writers in this study, with the exception of Wollstonecraft, there are other aspects of their novels which support the more favourable view of the woman writer's special role held by Nancy Cott. In her study of the concept of "woman's sphere" in New England from 1780 to 1835, Cott describes the growth of an ideology of domesticity in the early nineteenth century, and points out that while this limited women's activities it also gave them "a social power based on their special female qualities rather than on general human rights. For women who previously held no particular avenue of power of their own . . . this represented an advance". This particular power, based on a concept of special female qualities, is also a feature of the woman novelist's role in England in the late eighteenth century. Like the nineteenth-century American woman, the late-eighteenth-century Englishwoman had some idea of the "woman's sphere" which, in Cott's opinion, "formed a necessary stage in the process of shattering the hierarchy of sex, and, more directly, in softening the hierarchical relationship of marriage".¹

The special role of the eighteenth-century woman novelist, then, though clearly restrictive, is also the source of some strength, and the women novelists' ideal of femininity, though ultimately unrealistic and repressive, could be used, for a short time, as the focus for new and enlightened ideas about women. However we eventually assess the achievements of these women novelists and the implications of their feminine ideal, it is clear that in one respect they share a position of great importance. In the late eighteenth century women writers were the important developers of a new literary tradition. They adopted the novel as their own, and in doing so made changes which have influenced the tradition of the English novel ever since.

¹The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 200.

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