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“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me”: Female Independence in the English Novel 1795 – 1820

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 10. srpna 2015 ……………………………….

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I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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This thesis has benefited greatly from the assistance of a number of people. I am therefore using this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who has supported me during the course of its writing; I am extremely thankful for their guidance, invaluably constructive criticism and friendly advice.

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Lastly, this paper would have never been completed were it not for the three amazing novelists, Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, whose works constitute the core of this thesis.

THESIS ABSTRACT

In the 1790s, the framework of women's protests against the injustice they faced underwent a distinctive change, which inevitably imprinted itself into contemporary literature. The period discussed in this thesis was chosen to exemplify the beginnings of feminist awakening present in the novels of three women writers: Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen. The aim of this thesis is to explore different attitudes towards attaining emotional, intellectual, social, and economic independence, while simultaneously discussing the period's construction of femininity, the discourse of natural rights, the issue of education, romantic love, and sensibility.

The introductory chapter describes the historical background and looks closely on the position of women in contemporary society in terms of their familiar and social status, economic dependence, education, character shaping, and their objectification of the marriage market. It also presents the view of women as depicted in conduct manuals and the works of the Jacobin (and also Anti-Jacobin) novelists. Finally, it introduces the novelists in question and elaborates on the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* on the authors under analysis.

The second chapter focuses its attention on the depiction of female independence in Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. It analyses the novel's approach towards social dependence, the influence of education and reading, emotional independence, and the question of maternity. As with all other analysed novels, the end of this chapter is devoted to the projection of the author into the polemics of the novel.

The third chapter pays attention to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*. It focuses mainly on the view of marriage as a prison and enslavement, arising from social, economic and legal oppressions of women. The issue of sensibility is dealt with in terms of Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, the power of feeling and female desire. The chapter also includes the analysis of madness and delusion, which leads to searching refuge in motherhood and a new kind of family based on sisterhood.

The following chapter focused on Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* explores such issues as determinism, cultural and social prejudices, inadequacy of the English legal system, male tyranny, or female objectification. Attention is also paid to the flexible notion of chastity and the heroine's refusal to submit to the fate of a fallen woman.

The final analytical chapter moves to the post-1810 period onto Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and places the author on the junction between the radical and conservatives female writers. It shows Austen as faithful to the historically conditioned construction of gender and social order; yet, it also refers her use subversive features, such as the question of spinsterhood, active female engagement in economy and society, or the challenging notion of separate spheres.

The main intention of this thesis is to describe a rather turbulent era of the 1790s onwards, analysing works of different, yet similar, authors to present a detailed picture of the depiction of female independence in contemporary literature.

ABSTRAKT

V devadesátých letech osmnáctého století se velmi osobitě změnil rámec ženských protestů proti nespravedlnostem, kterým byly ženy nuceny čelit, což nevyhnutelně vedlo k reflektování této změny v soudobé literatuře. Období, kterým se tato bakalářská práce zabývá, bylo vybráno k tomu, aby zachytilo počátky vzrůstajícího feministického hnutí, jež bylo typické pro romány tří autorek: Mary Haysové, Mary Wollstonecraftové a Jane Austenové. Cílem této práce je prozkoumat rozličné přístupy k získávání emoční, intelektuální, sociální a ekonomické nezávislosti. Mimoto práce pojednává i o dobové konstrukci ženskosti, o dobové debatě na téma přirozených práv člověka, o problému vzdělání, romantické lásky a citovosti.

Úvodní kapitola popisuje historické pozadí konce osmnáctého století a detailně se dívá na pozici ženy v soudobé společnosti v rámci jejího rodinného a společenského postavení, ekonomické nezávislosti, vzdělání, formování charakteru a objektivizaci na manželském trhu. Tato část pracuje také s tím, jak se na ženu dívaly práce jakobínů (a také anti-jakobínů) a knihy věnované chování žen. V neposlední řadě představuje autorky a zkoumá, nakolik byly ovlivněné pojednáním od Mary Wollstonecraftové, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na vyobrazení ženské nezávislosti v románu Mary Haysové *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Z analytického hlediska rozebírá přístup tohoto románu ke společenské nezávislosti, vlivu vzdělání a čtení, k emoční nezávislosti a otázce mateřství. Stejně tak jako všechny probírané kapitoly i tato část je zakončena projekcí autora do polemiky románu.

Třetí kapitola věnuje pozornost knize *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* od Mary Wollstonecraftové. Zaměřuje se především na vyobrazení manželství jako vězení a zotročení, jež vycházelo ze sociálního, ekonomického a legálního utlačování žen. Problematika citovosti je zkoumána z hlediska Rousseaovy *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, síly citu a ženské touhy. Tato část obsahuje také analýzu šílenství a mylné představy, která vede k hledání útočiště v mateřství a novém typu rodiny založené na sesterství.

Následující kapitola zaměřená na román *The Victim of Prejudice* od Mary Haysové prozkoumává takové záležitosti jako determinismus, kulturní a společenské předsudky, neadekvátnost anglického právního systému, tyranii ze strany mužů a objektivizaci ženy. Pozornost je věnována i pružnému pojmu cudnosti a hrdinčině odmítání podvolit se osudu padlé ženy.

Poslední z analytických kapitol se posouvá do období po roce 1810 k dílu Jane Austenové *Persuasion* a umisťuje autorku na rozhraní mezi radikálními a konservativními spisovatelkami. Kapitola ukazuje Austenovou jako věrného stoupence historicky podmíněné konstrukci pohlaví a společenského uspořádání. Zároveň ale také odkazuje k jejímu užití subversivních prvků jako otázky staropanenství, aktivní ženské účasti v ekonomice a společnosti či zpochybňovaného pojmu oddělených sfér.

Hlavním účelem této bakalářské práce je popsat poměrně bouřlivou éru od devadesátých let osmnáctého století a dále zanalyzovat práce odlišných, a přesto podobných autorů, aby došlo k vytvoření detailního představy o vyobrazování ženské nezávislosti v soudobé literatuře.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The title of this thesis works with a quotation taken from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. In chapter 23, Jane tries to free herself from Rochester's embrace, saying "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will [...]"[1] The quote was, however, not chosen randomly. The concept of a trapped bird, especially that of a bird in a cage has been examined by a number of scholars, and is often connected to female dependence. One of such studies involves Marilyn Frye's theory of oppression in which she compares the oppression of women to the situation of a bird in a cage, in which a woman can become caught and where, no matter what she chooses to do, a bar puts difficulties in her way. Those barriers are very often hard to recognize if one looks at the wires microscopically, one by one, but when they

> take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. [...] It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.[2]

Using this bird imagery, Frye expresses her dissatisfaction with the social construction of female lives. The use of a bird, both caged and free, illustrates the degree of patriarchal subjugation of women stemming from social and institutional confines placed upon matriarchal power. It is precisely this binary view of the bird's freedom in a cage that will be used as a fundamental tool in analysing the complex topic of independence in the English novel between 1795 and 1820.

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994) 252.
[2] Marilyn Frye, "Oppression," *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men*, ed. Anne Minas (Wadsworth: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000) 12.

Until quite recently, modern feminist literary criticism seemed to be preoccupied mainly with the interpretation of the growing female independence of such characters as Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet or Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. Jane's commitment to dignity, unwillingness to submit to male emotional power and readiness to speak her mind, and Elizabeth’s inner strength, spontaneity and struggle to express her individuality in a society that demanded strict social conformity – those both broke the traditional views of feminine submissiveness and produced a new prototype of a literary heroine. However, the attention has for some time been concentrated also on other literary heroines, and similar principles of the struggle to identify woman's self-hood, femininity and independence can be observed already in the works of the female writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Hence the novels of such authors as Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft or Fanny Burney began to be studied alongside the novels of Sarah Grand or Virginia Woolf. Recent scholars have also put an emphasis on the implications for feminism arising from political and social ideas and activities, and stressed the need to recognize the relationship between the changes in public and private spheres and women’s position within them. It is therefore vital that attention be paid to the historical background of this thesis.

The time span of the thesis covers the turbulent era of the French Revolution, French Enlightenment, English radicalism, the first and second Romantic generations, and mainly a significant change of the political picture - an era which ends with the arrival of the conservative and morally rooted Victorian novel in 1832. Discussions of the female question had of course existed long before the end of the eighteenth century, but as Barbara Caine states, “the framework of women’s protests against the injustice they faced

and their ideas and arguments underwent a distinctive change [in the 1790s]."[3] The central feminist concern of this time was the discussion of prostitution, female desire and friendship, alongside the preoccupation with women's education, rational marriage, appropriate standards of motherhood, and the demand that women's oppression be dealt with through legal, political and social change. As Caine further suggests, contemporary emergence of the female question "was thus not the product of any obvious improvement in the situation of women, but rather a response to a changing political and economic framework which affected women in many complex and contradictory ways" (5).

In Britain, the emergence of the female question was closely related to a number of social and economic changes brought by industrialization and urbanization in the second half of the eighteenth century and accompanied by the rise of wealth and power of the middle class and by the arising emphasis on individualism and economic independence. But as Caine stresses out, it was the political upheaval of the French Revolution and the debates about political rights and citizenship which surrounded it that brought the first intensive discussion of female emancipation (11). The French Revolution brought with itself a general acceptance of the need for women's rights as women both in France and England demanded citizenship and direct involvement in political life. The paradoxical result of the French Revolution, however, consisted also of the fact that it simultaneously provided the possibility of emancipation and citizenship for women while denying them political and economic freedoms gained by men.[4] In a similar way, the

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[3] Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780 - 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 4. All future references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

[4] In France, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* was passed in 1789 and became a fundamental document of the French Revolution and of the history of human and civil rights. The *Declaration* recognized many rights as belonging to male citizens (women therefore had no rights as citizens). The French Revolution did not lead to the recognition of women's rights and this prompted the French radical thinker Olympe de Gouges to publish *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* in September 1791. She exposes the failure of the French Revolution, which had been devoted to equality, saying: "This revolution will only take effect when all women become fully aware of their deplorable condition, and of the rights they have lost in society."

process of industrialization brought the possibility of economic independence and self-reliance for all, including middle-class women, although such independence was rarely possible and usually explicitly denied.[5] As Caine mentions, "'dependence' [was] becoming as much an attribute of middle-class femininity as 'independence' was of masculinity" (12).

The process of industrialization and urbanization was also accompanied by the changing social and economic situation of women, both within the wider society and within family. As a side effect of industrialization, there was a sharp increase in the size and power of the urban middle class accompanied, besides other things, by the end of the traditional idea that families were income-earning units in which all members participated. This concept was replaced by a new view of a man as a household head, securing his wife and daughters within the domestic realm. The emphasis on women's domestic role was closely connected to their late eighteenth-century preoccupation with family life and the importance attributed to the care and nurture of children. The term "family" itself underwent a significant change of meaning as it began to be increasingly associated with the unit composed of parents and their children (in contrast to the earlier meaning stressing the notion of lineage). The role of mothers gained a new significance due to the emphasis placed on the close maternal involvement in the life of children, including breast-feeding, care and education. Works of Rousseau and his followers depicted women as the central figures of the family. However, as Caine argues, although the appreciation of women's domestic and familial role suggested greater power for women, it also paradoxically led to the re-enforcing of their legal and economic subordination to men (15).

[5] Such discourse was, of course, non-existent for working class women.

This generally accepted view of maternity came from the moral and religious concerns of the evangelicals who emphasized the importance of home as “the centre of moral and religious life” and saw women as “the central figures within the domestic religious community” (15). A woman was not only a mother, but also a companion and an advisor to her husband, a female domestic hero, “an image of activity, strength, fortitude, and ethical maturity, of self-denial, purity and truth” (16). The woman’s role was therefore confined primarily to the private sphere of her home and family. There was a tendency to keep the public and the private spheres completely separate, although such a separation was basically impossible.[6] Increasingly, women began to be publically and also politically active (either as patriots, or reformers and radicals), which led to a huge wave of disagreement. For example, for Rousseau, erasing the line between the public and the private meant the disturbance of a social and political order. In his view, a woman should be subjected to silence and be guided by the public opinion and the dictates of men - an idea which he based on his elaborate analysis of the differences between men and women in such spheres as anatomy and physiology, intellect, emotions, and moral capacities.

The notion of the public sphere therefore became gendered. While men inhabited the public sphere, women were increasingly more confined to their private spheres, and any public role of women underwent consistent criticism (Rousseau even argued that any female involvement in the public sphere was to be regarded as immoral or indecent). Whereby the meaning of the phrase “a public man” was understood in terms of political

[6] Most contemporary conceptualizations of the public sphere are based on the ideas expressed in Jürgen Habermas's book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. It is described in a following manner: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.“ Seyla Benhabib notes that in Habermas' idea of the public sphere, the distinction between public and private issues separates issues that normally affect women into the private realm and out of the discussion in the public sphere.

or communal involvement, a “public woman” was a prostitute. The life of Mary Wollstonecraft would be an excellent example of what happened when a woman deviated from the strict propriety of the contemporary society: her passionate relationship with Gilbert Imlay, her illegitimate daughter, and her unconventional marriage to William Godwin brought a quick end to her good reputation. A woman was therefore wholly restricted to her domestic identity as a wife, mother, or daughter, to submissiveness and the will of her husband.

Correspondingly, political economy responded to the social distinctions between the private and public spheres. A woman was left wholly dependent on a patriarchal figure in her family circle - be it a father, a brother or a husband. Solely on the basis of their sex, women were denied legal, political, and economic rights. Traditional English common law additionally discriminated married women through the doctrine called “coverture” or the “unity principle.” It is best described by an English jurist William Blackstone:

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a feme-covert […] under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord […][7]

Women were very often excluded from the inheritance processes and therefore consequently in a need of a husband who would provide for them. And since a family was perceived as a key unit of the whole society, the question of marriage and matrimony was of great interest. As Lenka Vomáčková states in her MA thesis concerned with courtship

[7] Claudia Zaher, “When a Woman’s Marital Status Determined Her Legal Status: A Research Guide on the Common Law Doctrine of Coverture,“ *Law Library Journal* 93.4 (2002): 460, <http://people.virginia.edu/~jdk3t/ZaherWMS.pdf> 3 August 2015.

and marriage as depicted in the English novel between 1780 and 1860, "[i]n England of the 18th and 19th century, prospects of unmarried girls on the marriage market were not very favourable."[8] She mentions lists and catalogues of potential brides and "a new and troublesome phenomenon, the spinster lady who never married."[9] In her view, it is arguable that marriage represented a certain form of happiness for the unmarried girl in terms of her future social prospects. In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice*, Mary Hays gives a taste of the problems an unmarried lady faces upon having been left financially unsupported after the death of a familial patriarchal figure and without a husband to secure her financial needs. And spinsterhood also did not enjoy much social prestige, viewed mostly as ridiculous. In 1833, J. S. Mill still complains about the same situation saying:

> Women are so brought up, as not to be able to subsist in the mere physical sense, without man to keep them: they are so brought up as not to be able to protect themselves against injury or insult, without some man on whom they have a special claim, to protect them [...] A single woman therefore is felt both by herself and others as a kind of excrescence on the surface of society, having no use, or function, or office there.[10]

It is therefore no wonder that women were regarded as goods to be taken on a marriage market, as a property passed from a father to a future husband. Their existence was permanently reduced to objects of male sexual desire rather than "objects seeking to articulate and express their own desires" (2) and needs. Recent feminist criticism is concerned not only with the questions of marriage, prostitution and sexual violence, but also with the concept of female sexuality and "autonomous sexual desire" (2). More

[8] Lenka Vomáčková, *Representing Courtship and Marriage in the English Novel 1780 - 1860* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2012) 8. MA thesis.
[9] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 243.
[10] John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, *Essays on Sex Equality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) 72.

radical female writers of that time demanded sexual freedom of women - freedom to negotiate sexual relationships without the bonds of marriage and to express their sexuality outside the constricted norms of the middle-class society. However, the concept of female sexuality was still seen as a taboo and women were forced to conform to the rules of the contemporary social system without addressing their own needs except for the need to secure themselves financially.

In order to succeed on the marriage market, as Vomáčková further adds, "the heroine has to cope with the ideas and norms of femininity. In other words, she must have a good character, amiable appearance and developed intellectual abilities if she wants to win the attention of suitors."[11] Hence the eighteenth century continued in the tradition of writing conduct books and manuals directed mainly at daughters and unmarried girls. Those books provided guidelines for women's behaviour: how they should think and act in social situations to be attractive for marriage. As Kiran Thakur and Mary Beth Simpson state, "[c]onduct books were used, on a more fundamental level, to prevent women from becoming too mobile and aware of their duties in the changing social atmosphere of the eighteenth century."[12] Yet, it is problematic to define what exactly the good qualities of a female were composed of. James Fordyce speaks in his *Sermons to Young Women* about "modesty, meekness, prudence, piety, with all virtuous and charitable occupations, all beautiful and useful accomplishments suited to their rank and condition."[13] He saw women and men as inhabiting separate spheres that were complementary. Instead of being seen as inferior to men, women were in Fordyce's conduct books given much more prominence and elevated on the social ladder for their missions at home. Although he

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[11] Vomáčková 20.

[12] Kiran Thakur and Mary Beth Simpson, *Eighteenth Century Women's Emotions*, <http://umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/emotions/conduct_books.html> 27 July 2015.

[13] James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (New York: M Carey, 1809) 3. The quotation was accessed through Vomáčková's *Representing Courtship and Marriage in the English Novel 1780 - 1860.*

celebrated the notion of femininity, he also assigned women passive asexuality, seeing them only as angels that were born to be amiable. However, more feminist-oriented Mary Wollstonecraft emphasizes instead intellectual faculties of women: "the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, [and] knowledge [...]"[14] Still, the idea of a woman as an angel influence the social thinking for a long. The angelic woman of the eighteenth century did not aspire to gain superior education or social rights; her attention was devoted fully to the care of her family and support of her husband. It is therefore vital to mention that with the arising issue of the female question the society was simultaneously faced with two distinct notions of femininity and it influenced the depiction of the literary heroine, especially in terms of her independence.

Apart from the conduct books, the 1790s also saw the new political and philosophical movement of English Jacobinism, which Gary Kelly describes as "a state of mind, a cluster of indignant sensibilities, a faith in reason, [and] a vision of the future."[15] Like their French colleagues the Girondins, English Jacobins inherited the values descending from "the eighteenth century empirical tradition, the French and Scottish Enlightenments, and English religious dissent, and which the French Revolution transformed into Romanticism."[16] The fundamental principles of its philosophy was the conviction that experience was the core of all knowledge, that environment produced character, that men were innately good, and that a faith in truth would make people free.[17] Those ideas and beliefs served as a touchstone for the philosophy and fiction of not only male Jacobin writers as William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, or Robert Bage, but also for

[14] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996) 11.
[15] Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780 - 1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 2.
[16] Gary Kelly, ed., Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* by Mary Wollstonecraft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) viii.
[17] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* viii.

women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, or Elizabeth Inchbald. The model for their writings was Rousseau. The organized English Jacobins of the early 1790s believed in the possibility of a parliamentary reform and saw the French Revolution as a stimulus to extend the scope of liberties of people. They were, however, not revolutionaries in the literal meaning of the world for they abhorred violence. They often had direct personal experience with social, legal, or moral oppression, and opposed any such kind of tyranny or persecution of individuals. Their main focus was simply placed on reason that should "decide the issue in human affairs and human government, not power based on money, age, rank, sex, or physical strength."[18]

Besides the ideas of the French Enlightenment and the native political and philosophical tradition, the most significant influence on English Jacobin novels comes with the events surrounding the 1790s. The French Revolution of 1789 inspired a great wave of radicalism in England. In the early 1790s, many English intellectuals such as Tom Paine or Mary Wollstonecraft saw the fall of the French monarchy as "a sign of the dawning of a new age of equality and freedom."[19] The sympathizers of the Revolution were all in favour of a system of government based on liberty, rational judgement, and individual merit. Authors like Godwin and Holcroft later began to emphasize the power of imagination and feeling rather than striving for the achievement of individual moral reform, and turned to Romanticism instead, thus transforming the English Jacobin novel into the Romantic novel or the novel of sentimental satire.[20] Not surprisingly, the attempt to claim the rights of men for women was met with particular controversy. It was seen by the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* as an attack on the stability of the British family

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[18] Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* 8.
[19] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xii.
[20] Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* 12.

and the security of the nation. In response to Mary Hays's epistolary novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* stressed the impossibility of co-existence of female rights and social decency:

> [T]he plain question is – Whether it is most for the advantage of society that women should be so brought up as to make them dutiful daughters, affectionate wives, tender mothers, and good Christians, or, by a corrupt and vicious system of education, fit them for revolutionary agents, for heroines, for Staels, for Talliens, for Stones, setting aside all the decencies, the softness, the gentleness, of the female character, and enjoying indiscriminately every envied privilege of man?[21]

The attack on the oppressive structure of the eighteenth-century family became one of the trademarks of the English Jacobin texts and its close link to the theory of rights led to the creation of a unique form of the domestic novel. According to Nina Baym, who describes the genre in *Woman's Fiction*, the basic plot of woman's fiction involves "the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world."[22] However, when the Jacobin novel represented the family, it was directly engaged with political power. Its goal was to reveal the politics of the domestic life in connection to the arising formulation of inherited rights and to resist the separation of the public and the private sphere. The stories of the private world were used to demonstrate that the domestic authority could not equal the force deriving from the power of intellectual inquiry, self-governance, and legal subjecthood.

The memoir was also a commonly used literary genre of the political novelists of the 1790s for the mixture of the personal and the private. Using features of Samuel

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[21] E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* (London: Penguin Books, 1975) 270.

[22] Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1978) 11.

Richardson's confessional mode, the Jacobins frequently worked with personal histories and experiences to bear witness to public issues. While many of the Jacobin novelists expressed their views in political treaties, the novel offered them an opportunity to focus on the particular and to humanize. In the 1790s, however, novel writing still was not a privileged genre and the works served more as philosophical treatises rather than novels. The power of fiction was to raise consciousness of contemporary problems and preach their reform. It criticised the sentimental vision of woman's purity and supported female attempts at freedom. Women writers strived to balance their sympathies for the radical opposition of English Jacobins with themes originating in sentimental literature. The Jacobin novelists carried the novel into a political sphere. They wished to exhibit the oppression peculiar to women that arose from the partial laws and customs of society. Individual ideologies were often justified in the novels themselves. The works were polemical, devoted to public issues, but they derived from personal experience; female writers functioned as social and moral commentators. The novels are therefore full of contemporary observations and comments on the parallels between the domestic and political life, or private and public morality. As Gary Kelly states, "There were no great novels published in England during the 1790s, but there were many interesting ones."[23]

At that time when the traditional depiction of a woman appeared predominantly in terms of her established social roles as a daughter, wife and mother, some female novelists still succeeded in offering their unique insight into the issue. One the one hand, their portrayal of heroines parallels the conventional description of an emotional female mind capable of rational thinking and perception. Yet, on the other hand, their main emphasis is placed on woman's self-hood, integrity and her attempt at self-expression on the way towards achieving intellectual, emotional, social, or economic independence.

[23] Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* 1.

Their characters therefore naturally possess a specific ability of self-reflection and are inclined towards a change of their prescribed roles. The period's preoccupation with the novel of sensibility then offers a direct insight into the inner psychology of the heroine.

The literature of the 1790s, as represented by the chosen novelists, varies in its approach towards the recorded events: Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft are both strictly categorized by their radical belonging to the Jacobins. Their main concern is the polemical *roman á la thése*. Their radical approach towards society and the rights of women was met with harsh criticism on the part of the more conservative society. On the other hand, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* belongs already to the post-1810 period and the novelist's views differ from those of the Jacobin writers. She does not engage with the social protest directly, but comments on the social situation from a rather distant position (using the novel of manners, for instance). Yet, while Austen formally conforms to the conservative tradition and both politically and ideologically advocates the status quo, she also includes subversive features in her novels (for example, a heroine with a strong personality). The thesis will thus focus on the signs of arising female independence that are inherently common to all these novelists.

Mary Wollstonecraft clearly occupies a central position in any discussion about the origins of feminism. It is not only her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that is important in the history of feminism, but also her novels which follow the sufferings and oppression particular to her own sex. As a follow-up to Wollstonecraft's beliefs, her contemporary Mary Hays struggles for the recognition of female sexuality and women's autonomous desire, the possibility of equality in marriage, and the importance of proper education for girls. Like Wollstonecraft, Hays attempted to balance the relationship between feminist politics, female independence, and romantic feelings. Her passion for William Frend can be easily compared to Wollstonecraft's yearning for her lover, Gilbert

Imlay; their Enlightenment thinking was therefore at the same time animated by strong feelings and sensibility which reflect themselves into their novels. Wollstonecraft's influence extends itself also into the works of more conservative authors like Jane Austen. Similarly to Wollstonecraft, Austen highlighted the need of female education and emphasized the superiority of rational motherhood, which was made possible only because of the education of the mother, as opposed to the sentimental and misdirected motherhood of women living through their emotions and stressing their own femininity. She also shared her view of the connection between rational education and the control of feeling, focusing especially on the contrast between education and wise marriage on the one hand, and frivolity, ignorance, and destructive imprudence on the other. (29)

Wollstonecraft imprinted herself into the minds and works of other proto-feminist writers very much because of the significant impact of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which has long been recognized as the central text of late eighteenth-century British concept of the female question. It provides a strong critique of female education and of the traditional assumptions concerning marriage and domestic life:

> My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.[24]

[24] Wollstonecraft 8.

Most importantly, Wollstonecraft introduces the fundamental feminist demand that women be given the same right for autonomy and citizenship as men. Through her direct reaction to the events of the French Revolution, she manages to make the matter of female oppression a major political issue and express her outrage at the fact that women were being denied their rights and freedom by those who demanded new right for men:

> In this style argue tyrants of every denomination from the weak king to the weak father of a family; they are all eager to crush out reason; yet always assert that they usurp its throne only to be useful. Do you not act a similar part, when you *force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families, groping in the dark?[25]

Interestingly enough, like many of her contemporaries, Wollstonecraft supports Rousseau's insistence on the essential quality of the direct maternal care and the role of women in providing education for their children, seeing those activities as transforming motherhood into an important female function.

The period discussed in the thesis was therefore chosen to exemplify the beginning of the feminist awakening present in the novels of the three women writers. Emphasis is given on the period's construction of femininity, the discourse of natural rights, independence, and the freedom of expression. Different attitudes towards attaining emotional, intellectual, social, and economic independence will be discussed in Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, and Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* will be dealt with within the context of female sexual individuality, passion and education. The analysis of Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* will focus on the power of female imagination as liberating of physical

[25] Wollstonecraft 3.

imprisonment in a mental institution, on the extramarital relationship between Maria and Darnford, and Jemima's fate in the context of a patriarchal society. The issues of independence in Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* will be discussed in terms of determinism, social and cultural prejudices, and the notion of chastity. Austen's *Persuasion* will then represent a conservative view of female independence including the sense of duty and restraint; yet, Anne Elliot will open such subversive topics as spinsterhood, sense of belonging and character maturity.

The analysis of independence in those four novels will also comment on the topic of a woman's position both in society and a family, on the question of female reading and education and on such delicate issues as matrimonial relationships, love affairs and infidelity. The novels are chosen to explore different kinds of femininity and female independence, concerning women of different social status. This enables not only a complex examination of the forms and variations of femininity, but also a survey of the circumstances and subsequent consequences of achieving one's independence.

II. FEMALE INDEPENDENCE IN MARY HAYS'S *MEMOIRS OF EMMA COURTNEY*

> I love action, but I have but little to employ myself in; I love society, but my sex and acquired delicacy, and still more the narrowness of my fortune, deprives me of this resource. I would travel, I would change the scene, I would put myself in the way of receiving new impressions, I would sluice of my thoughts into various channels, I would place myself in new situations, I would propose to myself new labours, and engage with ardor in new pursuits— all this I should prescribe to another in my circumstances, but all this is, to me, unattainable. Ah! how impotent is mere reasoning against reiterated feeling![1]

This is what Mary Hays wrote to William Godwin on November 13, 1795, but it might be safely assumed that the words could have been uttered by the main character of Hays's epistolary novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*[2], Emma Courtney herself. They both share a number of character traits – passion, emotionality, energy, intensity, and eloquence. This short extract of Hays's personal correspondence aptly summarizes "the yearnings and frustrations of a woman living in late-eighteenth-century English society" (vii) that they both experienced. According to Hays, the world should not be based on boundaries but rather on its fusion, on the equality of all things. In her works, she attempted to break down and then blend traditional opposites – reason with passion, female with male, freedom with restraint, public with private, or autobiography with fiction. Hays strongly believed that her private world – all her personal disappointments, heartbreaks, desires, ambitions, and beliefs – served as a rich source of material for her political and intellectual involvement in the public sphere (vii). In this sense, *Memoirs of Emma*

[1] [Hays to Godwin] "The Idea of Being Free," 13 October 1795, Pforzheimer MS, MH 8. Twenty-seven letters written by Mary Hays to William Godwin between 1794 and 1796 are at the Carl Pforzheimer Library in New York.
[2] Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). All future references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Courtney became her personal political treatise, deriving directly from her own love affairs with John Eccles and later with William Frend, and also from her strong personal convictions concerning individuality, independence and womanhood.

Such an autobiographical impulse was not limited to Hays only; it was rather a trend that can be found in a number of writers of the 1790s, especially in the works of Jacobin novelists who combined veiled autobiography with the polemical *roman á la thése*. From their experience they fashioned the structure of their philosophy as well as their fiction and attempted to innovate it with materials drawn from their own lives. As Gary Kelly suggests, their works exemplify "how philosophy and politics, feminism and autobiography, could all be transmuted into the form of popular fiction."[3]

In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney,* Hays's blending of reason with passion imprints itself also onto the question of independence.[4] Although Emma strives for various kinds of independence and wishes not to be perceived only as a sexual object, she also desperately wants to be immersed into passion and become someone's wife – this alone brings with itself a significant level of dependency. This chapter will therefore examine the fusion of freedom with self-imposed restriction, focusing on specific expressions of independence that Emma managed to gain by blending the traditional opposites. Attention will be also paid to the author who in many respects projected Jacobin ideas onto the character of Emma Courtney and onto her attempt at liberating herself socially, economically, sexually, and emotionally, while simultaneously preserving the centrality of courtship and marriage as set in the mind of the contemporary lady.

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[3] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria*, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) xv.

[4] Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Hays stands on the edge between sentimentalism and rationality that corresponds to the age of sensibility. Later in her career, in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft recognizes the dangers of failing to reconcile romance with reality. Denouncing Rousseau and the oppression of women through sensibility, she saw the solution in the nobility of feeling and rational passion.

After the death of her mother, Emma is placed into the family of her aunt and uncle. The harmonious environment surrounding her resembles features of Hays's idea of equality. Emma's uncle represents an ideal husband and father, living with his wife in a loving marriage and giving his children the freedom to grow both physically and mentally. The family is by no means restricted by his persona; yet, the division of labours and responsibilities parallels that of the average eighteenth-century household in which duties are strictly divided into those for men and those for women. Outside the house, Emma finds herself in a patriarchal society whose main principles centre around the idea of the superiority of men and their ownership of women; the woman, and therefore also Emma, is left wholly dependent on the father or the husband. Female gender is constructed and restricted accordingly: the gap is created between what women are and what they ought to be, which Emma starts to realize and despise since her early years. The society around her sees a woman as a beautiful creature in need of protection whose expected role is anticipatory of a Victorian ornamental wife: to be beautiful, obedient to her husband and of an uncomplicated character. A woman's position in society is highly objectified and her role is reduced to that of a sexual object. A friend of Emma's father sums this overall notion of a woman by saying:

> The mind of a young lady should be clear and unsullied, like a sheet of white paper, or her own fairer face: lines of thinking destroy the dimples of beauty; aspiring the reason of man, they lose the exquisite, fascinating charm, in which consists their true empire; −Then strongest, when most weak−
>
> "Loveliest in their fears−
> And by this silent adulation, soft,
> To their protection more engaging man" (22).

What he is referring to is the conservative construct of the power of a weak woman, as perceived for example in Fordyce's compendium *Sermons to Young Women*. This

passage should also be linked to the period's construction of the sentimental heroine. The conservative political issues related to sensibility consisted of the image of a frail woman; yet, this period also sees the Jacobin writers such as Wollstonecraft pleading for an empowering potential of unrestrained feeling. It is, however, necessary to mention that such a route usually leads the heroine to her own destruction, as seen for instance in Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction*.[5]

It is the same man that also expresses his astonishment at the fact that Emma reads. It is evident that he considers reading as a strictly male occupation: "Heavens, Mr Courtney! you will spoil all her feminine graces; knowledge and learning, are insufferably masculine in a woman–born only for the soft solace of man" (22). As Eleanor Ty observes, "[t]hrough Emma's account of her childhood, Hays raises questions about the efficacy of female education" (xxiii) - a question which was often discussed not only by Hays but also by Wollstonecraft. Emma's character is highly influenced by her reading of literature. As a child, her aunt read her and her cousins "stories from the Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of marvellous import"[6] (14) that fire Emma's imagination:

> [S]tories were still my passion, and I sighed for a romance that would never end. In my sports with my companions, I acted over what I had read: I was alternatively the valiant knight—the gentle damsel—the adventurous mariner—the daring robber—the courteous lover—and the airy coquet (15).

Her passion for reading grows rapidly, to the point where it practically lacks any control. Mr Courtney becomes alarmed by how much the contents of Emma's books actually

[5] Due to my previous claims about Wollstonecraft's promotion of rational passion, it is vital to state that Wollstonecraft started her literary and philosophical career as a Rousseauist, making the claim for the power of feeling, its supremacy, yet inevitable destructiveness for women, as in *Mary, A Fiction.* However, later she began to see it as a problem and moved towards a critique of Rousseau and into rational feminism, as seen for instance in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* or *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*.

[6] Such oriental tales like *Vathek* by Beckford are linked to Gothic tales and are a part of the pre-romantic movement.

influence her, fearing that her "fancy requires a *rein* rather than a *spur*" (21). He discovers that her "imagination [has been] left to wander unrestricted in the fairy fields of fiction" (21) and decides to control her education. It is therefore evident that he does not share his friend's opinion on women who read; for him, women should not merely stay "blank paper[s]" (23). Under his guidance, Emma gains her intellectual independence. She herself describes the outcomes of her studies as something that gives her the desired confidence:

> [M]y mind began to be emancipated, doubts had been suggested to it, I reasoned freely, endeavoured to arrange and methodize my opinions, and to trace them fearlessly through all their consequences: while from exercising my thoughts with freedom, I seemed to acquire new strength and dignity of character (25).

However, one particular book leaves a huge impact on her mind and her further perception of love – Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Emma describes its reading with great aggravation informative of the sensations attacking her mind:

> Ah! with what transport, with what enthusiasm, did I peruse this dangerous, enchanting, work!—How shall I paint the sensations that were excited in my mind!—the pleasure I experienced approaches the limits of pain—it was tumult—all the ardour of my character was excited.—Mr Courtney, one day, surprised me weeping over the sorrows of the tender St Preux. He hastily snatched the book from my hand, and, carefully collecting the remaining volumes, carried them in silence to his chamber: but the impression made on my mind was never to be effaced—it was even productive of a long chain of consequences, that will continue to operate till the day of my death (25).

As Claire Grogan explains, reading Rousseau's *Héloïse* was invariably a dangerous act for the female reader of the late eighteenth century:

> [N]o one novel appears to epitomize the genre's dangerously seductive characters so well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* [...] with its articulation of female sexuality and desire through Julie's willing participation in a sexual relationship with her tutor, St Preux. The intimate portrayal of Julie's living arrangements and affairs of the heart was widely thought inappropriate for the susceptible female character.[7]

Rousseau's sentimental novel is a precise indication of the revolutionary potential of sensibility in which the only authority to be followed was the heart. This new attitude towards conduct (according to Rousseau, the essential characteristic of man) emphasized the simplicity of sentiment and frank display of emotions without the intervention of the intellect. It was also taken as a literary activity in which sensibility was manifested on the body. As Gary Kelly states, "sensibility appealed particularly to those who were socially marginalized," therefore also to women. This possibility, he suggests, "gave Sensibility a revolutionary potential."[8] Its convergence with politics is seen in sentimental novels of the 1790s known for their excessive emotionality.[9]

The fact that Mr Courtney snatches the book from Emma's hands has serious consequences. In this way, Emma gets to read only the first volume of the book, i.e. the seduction plot. As Katherine Binhammer observes, Emma is prevented by her father "from reading its didactic warning against sexual transgression" in the latter two volumes, and is instead "sexually awakened and experiences the first transports of desire."[10] Grogan further adds that "*La Nouvelle Héloïse* presents a new way to express female sexuality and portrays an ideal lover for whom the heroines search in their own lives, but

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[7] Claire Grogan, "The Politics of Seduction in British Fiction of the 1790s: The Female Reader and Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11. 4 (1999): 460.

[8] Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: the Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992) 41.

[9] Such authors as Wollstonecraft often parodied the extremes of the genre or criticized the representation of women as irrational creatures overcome by physical sensation.

[10] Katherine Binhammer, "The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Memoirs of Modern Philosophers," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27. 2 (2003): 8-9.

with an obvious lack of success."[11] Emma is therefore left yielding. The target of her arising feeling becomes Augustus Harley whom she briskly compares to St Preux: "He was St Preux, the Emilius, of my sleeping and waking reveries" (59). As Jonathan Sachs summarizes, "[r]eading here becomes a process in which one is enveloped by uncontrollable passions, understood in both instances as pure and literal appetite, but with threatening implications of eros and the indulgence of sexual appetite."[12] At the time when female reading is seen as dangerous, leaving the woman eager and more susceptible to temptations, Emma gains education intellectually "superior to the generality of [her] oppressed sex" (117), but she also becomes highly dependent on her passions. She later accuses the lack of female involvement in the "drama of life" (86) for such a destruction of female mind.

The freedom with which Emma immerses herself into literature is contrasted with the "restrictive nature of her formal education" (xxiv) at boarding school. Emma remembers those days in the following way:

> Ah! never shall I forget the contrast I experienced. [...] [M]y actions were all constrained; —I was obliged to sit poring over needle-work, and forbidden to prate; —my body was tortured into forms, my mind coerced, and tasks imposed upon me, grammar and French, mere words, that conveyed to me no ideas (15).

As Ty explains, the purpose of such a limiting form of education was "to create the male fantasy of a feminine and sexualized woman with superficial ornamental skills. It does not provide a woman with practical or useful skills" (xxiv). Emma herself once mentions that she is just "a woman, to whom education has given sexual character" (117). In her

[11] Grogan 470. The textual dimension of the novel is also interesting for it provides a set of formulas for describing, understanding, representing, and conceptualising female sensibility and subjectivity. The existence of literary tropes also testifies to a certain stabilisation of such discourse, and its consolidation.
[12] Jonathan Sachs, "Emma Courtney and the Problem of Roman Reading," *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 84.

book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft expressed an opinion that women must be better educated if men want them to become good wives and mothers. She strongly criticised social practices that "decked [women only] with artificial graces."[13] Mary Hays even talked about "a complete system of artifice and despotism" that is "suspended over the victim, till the enfeebled and broken spirit submits to the trammels."[14] She agreed with Wollstonecraft that women were given a rather frivolous education that put an emphasis on female dependence. She observed:

> The greater proportion of young women are trained up by thoughtless parents; in ease and luxury, with no other dependence for their future support than the precarious chance of establishing themselves by marriage: for this purpose [...] elaborate attention is paid to external attractions and accomplishments, to the neglect of more useful and solid acquirements.[15]

The theme of dependence is echoed in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* numerous times through the imagery of the magic circle and the adamantine chain that symbolize "women's entrapment professionally, physically, and socially" (xxvi). The greatest obstacle in the form of financial dependence awaits Emma upon the death of her father who bequest her "[a] small pittance" which is "insufficient to preserve [her] from dependence" (31). Mr Francis advises her to use her talents, to "cultivate them, and [to] learn to rest on [her] own powers" (36) because "the first lesson of enlightened reason, the great fountain of heroism and virtue, the principle by which alone man can become what man is capable of being, is *independence*" (140). It is evident that Emma shares this worldview as she exclaims: "Dependence!—I repeated to myself, and I felt my heart die within me" (31). She listens to the advice of Mr Francis and starts planning her future

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[13] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol Poston (New York: Norton, 1975) 37.

[14] Mary Hays, "Improvements Suggested in Female Education," *The Monthly Magazine* 3 (March 1797): 193. The quotation was taken from Eleanor Ty's introduction to *Memoirs of Emma Courtney.*

[15] Hays, "Improvements Suggested in Female Education" 194.

establishment. She thinks of becoming an assistant of a mistress at school but discards the idea because it “[is] a species of servitude, and [her] mind pant[s] for freedom” (31). Blaming the “cruel prejudices” (31) of society towards a “hapless woman” (31) like her, she begins to realize the limitations arising from her inadequate and insufficient education and the consequences they have for her future employment:

> Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamantine chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell? (32)

Emma finds that the customs of society “have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman” (39). She feels as a social outcast upon the discovery that most professions are not available to her:

> Active, industrious, willing to employ my faculties in any way, by which I might procure an honest independence, I beheld no path open to me, but that to which my spirit could not submit—the degradation of servitude. Hapless woman!—crushed by the iron hand of barbarous despotism, pampered into weakness, and trained the slave of meretricious folly! (163)

As a woman unprovided for, she can either opt for service or prostitution, “the career of infamy, from whence the false and cruel morality of the world forbids [...] return, and perpetuates [...] disgrace and misery” (163). Her only other alternative is to solve her unprotected situation by marrying Mr Montague.

Mary Hays shows in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* a clear difference between marriages based on love and those based on convenience. The marriage of Emma’s parents was of practical nature, based on ambition and material gain, and brought only an

unhappy life and unsatisfactory social results. This family image is strongly contrasted with the marriage of the Melmoths, built solely on affection. As Ty observes, "[the home of Mr Melmoth] is the ideal example of the new style of domesticity" (xxviii) that is based on the friendship of the husband and his wife. Therefore, in her search for love, Emma wishes to find the same harmonious union as the Melmoths. This is the reason why she refuses Mr Montague's marriage proposal, saying: "Were my situation yet more desolate, I would not marry any man, merely for an *establishment*, for whom I did not feel an affection" (56). When asked to provide "the model of perfection which [she] should require in a husband" (56), she immediately mentions Augustus Harley that so closely resembles the romantic heroes of her books. As Ty explains, like other female writers of the 1790s, Hays experimented with the depiction of "the sensitive male protagonists who possessed refined judgement, generosity, and sympathy" (xxviii) - "a man of real feeling and sensitivity."[16] Emma is unwilling to surrender her emotional independence to mere financial support; yet, she is more than eager to become dependent on Augustus's love in return for genuine and passionate affection.

Emma becomes emotionally attached to Augustus whom she pursues even despite the evident lack of interest on Augustus's side. After she concludes that "*the desire of being beloved*, of inspiring sympathy, is congenial to the human heart" (79), she decides not to "hesitate to inform him of [her] affection" (79), of the "pervading and [the] devouring fire" (129) inside of her, and to do everything in her power to attain Augustus's love. Janet Todd mentions that Emma yearns for the conventional romantic ending but she wants to attain it by unromantic ways, i.e. by overtly proposing marriage to Harley by herself. For her, hiding her feelings would be "a false shame" (79) for she knows her pursuit is "little hazardous" (79) but it is also very much innocent. She calls the

[16] Margaret Anne Doody, Introduction to *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* by Frances Burney (Oxford: World's Classics, 1991) xxv - xxvi.

established social system “a pernicious system of morals” (79) consisting of masses accustomed to “bend implicitly to custom and prescription” (79). She therefore makes no apologies for her behaviour that “violated common forms” (97):

> because I feel no consciousness of weakness. An attachment sanctioned by nature, reason, and virtue, ennoble the mind capable of conceiving and cherishing it: of such an attachment a corrupt heart is utterly incapable (81 - 82).

The purity of her demeanour and the intensity of her passionate feelings lead her to a conclusion that her feelings are a product of natural affections and the law of nature, both of which are “too strong to be silenced by artificial precepts” (89) of society. Here again, she observes the “prejudices which have, systematically, weakened the female character” (100) ,stripping her of the capacity of energy and fortitude. She strongly believes that independence of a woman (be it emotional, sexual or existential) represents a natural state of things, while “the barbarous and accursed laws of society” (143) are responsible for its deprivation.

However, she is also very well-aware of the moral martyrdom she will have to suffer for her “courage to act upon advanced principles” (133). By her active pursuit of a man of her affections and her intellectual reasoning of her deeds, she violates the standard maxim of the contemporary conduct books stating that “a woman would modestly conceal or even repress her feelings until the man makes the first move.”[17] Eleanor Ty reads behind her vigour a specific way of coping with loss, be it her mother’s or her aunt’s. For Emma, August represents many things she lacks: the maternal, the state of plentitude and romantic love. She finds herself attracted to him because he has access to everything that Emma did not have.

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[17] William Stafford, *English Feminists and Their Opponents in the 1790s: Unsex'd and Proper Females* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 17.

Although determined to maintain her emotional and sexual independence, in the face of an irreversible financial bankruptcy she suffers, Emma accepts Mr Montague's second proposal. Ty argues that as the embodiment of her unfulfilled wished, Augustus could not satisfy Emma's social dissatisfactions and desires. Rather, Emma's desire is transformed into motherhood: "As a mother, Emma can fruitfully make use of her intelligence, her experience, and her sensibilities in an avenue acceptable to society" (xxxiv). In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft also articulates an ideological character of female sexuality, which she then sees rather as a social disease used against women as if it were a natural attribute of their bodies. Therefore, she constructs a future female body in terms of maternity rather than sexuality, which enables her to create a separate social role for women founded on her biological difference, but no longer limited sexually. Maternity would thus justify woman's active social role. However, Emma still decides for marriage and maternity under rather desperate conditions. Yet even so, her "every hour [is] devoted to active usefulness" (170), Montague becomes "more dear to [her]" (170) and she tastes "a pure, a chaste, and ineffable pleasure" (170) while watching her husband caress their new-born child. Ty therefore believes that the ending seems "at once to be a tribute to maternity and an elegy on romantic love and the potentials of woman" (xxxiv).

In many respects, the character of Emma Courtney corresponds to that of Mary Hays. She uses replicas of her letter to Godwin as Emma's letters to Mr Francis and it is therefore assumed that many of the letters to Augustus were originally Hays's letters to her romantic interest William Frend. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* are then seen as a direct result of Hays's pursuit of Frend. Although primarily a novel, it has strong autobiographical features. Tilottama Rajan speaks about the term autonarration, "a textually self-conscious work that draws upon personal experience as part of its rhetoric,

so as to position experience within textuality and relate textuality to experience."[18] She also defines autonarration as "a genre characterized by its transgressive miscegenation of private and public spaces."[19] Hays saw the core of the female question in the fact that society regarded women only in terms of their domestic identity as wives, mothers or daughter, but disregarded women as individuals and therefore did not allow them enough space to exercise their talents. In one of her letters to William Godwin she complained:

> I can think, write, reason, converse with men and scholars, and despise many petty, feminine, prejudices. But I have not the talents for a legislator or a reformer of the world, I have still many shrinking delicacies and female foibles, that unfit me for rising to arduous heights. [...] Where, then, shall I find this object to call forth my exertions, and preserve me from languor and apathy?[20]

In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* she therefore decided to demonstrate how women might claim the same rights as men and not be limited by their social position in consequence. She transported realistic problems into the visionary world of fiction which transcends the limitations of a woman's role in the family, which enables a woman to claim her identity independently of a male figure and therefore even actively pursue a romantic union with a married man.

The memoir, being both personal and public, was a popular literary form for the political novelists of the 1790s, including Hays. They used their own personal histories and experiences to "bear witness to public dilemmas."[21] The tenuous border between the fictional and the factual thus contributes to create a strong response to the contemporary

[18] Tilottama Rajan, "Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*," *Studies in Romanticism* 32.2 (1993): 149 - 176.
[19] Rajan 158.
[20] Letter 14, Pforzheimer Collection.
[21] Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and the Law* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 19.

social and political situation in Great Britain, serving as a novelized political treaty. Some critics regard *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* as a Bildungsroman that follows the development of Emma's mind on her way to recognizing her identity. Emma's pursuit of independence is met with strict social constrains which unable her to employ herself actively in the public sphere in the same way as a man. One can, however, read Emma's pursuit of Augustus as her attempt at fulfilling her social role as a wife and mother - an attempt that is thwarted by Augustus's refusal of Emma's approaches (xxiii). We can therefore perceive yet another of Hays's blendings that contributes to the main paradox of Hays's novel: Although Emma unwaveringly strives for her independence in a number of fields, she is eager to surrender herself to emotional dependence on Augustus. The core of this problem probably lies in the uneven approach of the Jacobin writers to the Enlightenment opposition of reason and passion. Hays was aware that there was something wrong with the old social paradigm, although, like the other female novelists, she was not entirely sure what the new conception of the male and the female identity should be and how the relationship between those new identities should look like. However, Hays's role in the tradition of the female proto-feminist writing is undisputable. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* certainly raise new questions about the position of a woman in society and her rights for independence - questions that yet need to be answered.

III. FEMALE INDEPENDENCE IN MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S *MARIA: OR, THE WRONGS OF WOMAN*

At the end of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft promised its readers a sequel. Instead of writing another philosophical treatise focused on her call for the equality between the sexes in particular areas of life, she offered her readers a novel tinged with autobiography and her political beliefs, called *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*. It was not unusual at that time to create a fictional story based on the principles of a polemical treatise; an example can be seen in Godwin's *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* which presented a fictive version of his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. In this way, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* could be viewed as a fictionalization of the arguments presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, even though such a presumption would not be completely true as *Maria* deviates from several crucial issues handled in the *Vindication*. Still, many scholars regard this work as her most extensive and significant feminist work for the means of addressing questions of marriage and sexuality, problems faced by working-class and middle-class women alike, and for its handling of motherhood and friendship.[1] Like other female English Jacobins, Wollstonecraft too wished to exhibit "desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society."[2] Much more interesting is then her desire to "show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various" (74), thus creating a possibility of dealing with female issues that cross class boundaries. Anne K. Mellor argues that Wollstonecraft attempted to detail

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[1] Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780 - 1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 38.

[2] *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* by Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 73. All future references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

both "the wrongs done *to* women and the wrongs done *by* women" (Mellor's emphasis).[3] The wrongs done *to* women include, as Mellor further explains, stifling and sexually repressed marriages described by Wollstonecraft through the use of slavery imagery, while the wrongs done *by* women include delusion of romantic feelings generated by sensibility and sentimentalism. By collecting her observations on the condition of woman and fusing them with her own feelings and passions, Wollstonecraft found a way to unite her own experience with that of women everywhere,[4] considering her story rather as that "of woman, than of an individual" (73). In *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft therefore introduces a heroine that is like any other woman "caught in a trap, and caged for life" (144) and whose experience carries larger political claims.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader is exposed to a Gothic-like scene in which Maria has just been placed into a decaying mansion which serves at once as a prison and a madhouse. Wollstonecraft chooses this setting on purpose to accentuate the connection between marriage and incarceration. As the "most horrid of prisons" (77), "this mansion of despair" (75) literalizes the condition of women across Britain. Looking retrospectively at her marriage, Maria makes a politically charged allusion to the French prison, the Bastille, declaring: "Marriage had bastilled me for life [...] fettered by the partial laws of society, this fair globe was to me an universal blank" (154 - 155). It is therefore not surprising for the reader to find Maria lamenting: "[Is] not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (79). For her body is truly sold and bought like a slave's. At first, her husband marries her for five thousand pounds promised by Maria's uncle on an open marriage market, and later offers her up for prostitution to certain Mr. S–, assuring him

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[3] Anne K. Mellor, " Righting the wrongs of woman: Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria," Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19.4 (1996): 415, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08905499608583434>.
[4] Gary Kelly, ed., Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* by Mary Wollstonecraft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) xvi.

> that every woman had her price, and, with gross indecency, hinted, that he [Mr Venables] should be glad to have the duty of a husband taken off his hands. These he termed *liberal sentiments*. He advised him not to shock my [Maria's] romantic notions, but to attack my credulous generosity, and weak pity; and concluded with requesting him to lend him five hundred pounds for a month or six weeks (161 - 162).

Commenting on her condition, Maria states:

> a wife [is] as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing she can call her own. He may use any means to get at what the law considers as his, the moment his wife is in possession of it […] and all this is done with a show of equity, because, forsooth, he is responsible for her maintenance (158 - 159).

According to scholar Mary Poovey, "Wollstonecraft's fundamental insight in *Maria* concerns the way in which female sexuality is defined or interpreted–and, by extension, controlled–by bourgeois institutions. The primary agent of this control is marriage."[5] The ideology of marriage is thus deconstructed; women are reduced to exchangeable commodities, objectified, and denied their natural rights.[6] While husbands assume that they need to do nothing to "render themselves attractive or desirable to their wives,"[7] Maria has no right to her body, to her inherited property or to her child. In her case, her marriage is indeed a prison that leads to other forms of imprisonment.

The scope of the novel is, however, not narrowed only to the description of the oppressions suffered by Maria, but Wollstonecraft does her best to make it evident that women of different economic positions are treated just the same simply because they are women. Starting with an upper-middle-class Maria, she continues to tell the stories of the

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[5] Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 100.
[6] Poovey 101.
[7] Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780 - 1805* 39.

lower-middle-class sailor's wife Peggy, the working-class shopkeeper, the boarding-house owners, and the domestic servant Jemima. At the first house in which Maria seeks refuge from her husband, she encounters a pale-looking landlady with haggard features who is convinced that "when a woman was once married, she must bear every thing" (170), for "[s]he toiled from morning till night; yet her husband would rob the till, and take away the money reserved for paying bills; and, returning home drunk, he would beat her if she chanced to offend him, though she had a child at the breast" (170 - 171). Maria's second landlady tells her a story with a similar outline: she had to suffer the trepidations of a husband who took her money to buy drinks and clothes for whores, and who even pawned her own clothes, only to be brushed off by a pawnbroker that her husband had a right to do so because "[i]t was all as one, [her] husband had a right to whatever [she] had" (177) under the protection of the law. Foreshadowing Maria's own later experience at court, the landlady observes that "women have always the worst of it, when law is to decide" (178). However, none of those tales expresses the amount of suffering that Jemima had to endure in her life, and through her tale Wollstonecraft describes many of the wrongs done *to* women by the patriarchal society.

As Gary Kelly states, if Maria's fate reveals that men control the laws, Jemima's story shows that they also control the economic system. Being "despised from [her] birth, and denied the chance of obtaining a footing for [herself] in society" (106), Jemima "had not even the chance of being considered as a fellow-creature" (106), "born a slave, and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of existence, without having any companions to alleviate it by sympathy, or teach [her] how to rise above it by their example" (106). Jemima is seduced, abandoned, and persecuted by the Poor Laws[8]: "Fate dragged me through the very kennels of society: I was still a slave, a bastard, a common

[8] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xviii.

property" (109). She detested her "nighty occupation" (109) of picking up "the pockets of the drunkards who abused [her]" and admits that her only independence "consisted in choosing the street in which [she] should wander, or the roof, when [she] had money, in which [she] should hide [her] head" (109). She is eventually forced into prostitution by economic necessity, and to escape such degrading work, she is "once more [forced to enter] into servitude" (110). She finds that only the hardest and lowest paid work is reserved for women:

> How often have I heard […] in conversation, and read in books, that every person willing to work may find employment? It is the vague assertion, I believe, of insensible indolence, when it relates to men; but, with respect to women, I am sure of its fallacy, unless they will submit to the most menial bodily labour; and even to be employed at hard labour is out of the reach of many, whose reputation misfortune or folly has tainted (114).

She quickly becomes aware of the fact that there is a difference between work designated for men and for women:

> A man with half my industry, and, I may say, abilities, could have procured a decent livelihood, and discharged some of the duties which knit mankind together; whilst I, who had acquired a taste for the rational, nay, in honest pride let me assert it, the virtuous enjoyments of life, was cast aside as the filth of society. Condemned to labour, like a machine, only to earn bread, and scarcely that […] (115).

Jemima is the most fleshed out of the lower-class women depicted in the novel. Through her portrayal, Wollstonecraft refuses to accept the submissiveness that is traditionally associated with femininity and expresses her frustration and anger over the conditions of women. Jemima's tale also challenges contemporary assumptions about prostitutes. Wollstonecraft basically rewrites the traditional narrative of a redeemed prostitute used for instance in Daniel Defoe's *Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers*

with A Proposal for lessening the present Number of Them.[9] Her prostitutes are demonstrated as exploited women that are only products of their environment and the conditions they are placed in. The uniqueness of Wollstonecraft's book lies in the fact that it gives voice to a working class prostitute and allows her to tell her story of immense and continuing suffering.[10] That story conveys the truth concealed by ideologically loaded assumptions about female propriety and respectability. By exposing both Maria and Jemima to prostitution, Wollstonecraft rejects two contemporary stereotypical views of prostitutes: the image of a woman who takes pleasure in her actions and is in fact in love with her keeper, and the image of a victim who seeks pity. She shows that in reality prostitutes neither enjoy their work, nor pine for their seducers, but are much in the same position as wives, "an exploited class, despising the men on whom they are dependent."[11] It is not until Maria shows her liberating passion for Darnford that Jemima realizes that feeling can be in fact noble.

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[9] As Kirsten Pullen observes, from at least the 1720s, first-person narratives by prostitutes and/or victims of seduction were a standard topos of sentimental literature and the issue of prostitution was of high popularity. Apart from other means of dealing with this topic, many reformers simply suggested teaching those women greater virtue and chastity. In *Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers with A Proposal for lessening the present Number of Them*, Daniel Defoe called on people to "let us by gender Allurements to Virtue, destroy the Hopes of any Succession of such miserable Sinners." Reformers like Defoe had a great impact on understanding the motives of a prostitute, casting her simply as a victim of her own easy virtue and the seduction of unscrupulous men. As innocent victims of seduction and objects of pity, prostitutes were capable of redemption, and their stories emerged "as an increasingly powerful cultural myth." In the eighteenth century, a prostitute was therefore seen more as a victim than as a repulsive, corrupted figure carrying disease and disorder, as depicted in the early nineteenth century.

[10] As Viven Jones argues, during the 1790s, versions of that sentimental reformist narrative are remobilised as part of a renewed interest in the prostitution issue. Writers concerned with women's social and educational status use the numbers of women entering prostitution as an argument for extending employment opportunities. Donna Andrew claims that the 1790s saw a significant shift in representations of the prostitute in the literature of social reform: from the innocent victim of sentimental narrative, the redeemable Magdalen, to the source of contagion which must be locked away from public sight or contact in penitentiaries. 1790s are also the moment at which prostitution becomes for the first time explicitly a feminist issue, through the radical Dissenting inheritance of writers like Wollstonecraft and Hays. Their contribution is to expose the story of economic injustice which is always the more or less explicit subject of the conventional sexual narrative, where the blame for female ruin is attributed to innocence and the libertine's sexual opportunism. As Jones further claims, the story of Jemina is different in that it offers a portrait of a "fallen" lower-class woman whose capacity for redemptive transformation is manifested, initially at least, in independent scepticism rather than in passive sensibility – and never in abject enitence. Indeed, Jemima is the source of hope to Maria, rather than the other way round.

[11] Claudia L. Johnson, "Mary Wollstonecraft's novels," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 205.

In the preface to *Maria: A Fiction*, Wollstonecraft establishes a specific goal to represent "the mind of a woman who has thinking powers" (1). That is done in contrast to the eighteenth century's most compelling novels such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* or Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* which somehow feature women who presumably have only "feeling powers" rather than "thinking powers" and whose sensibilities bind them very closely to the approval and disapproval of their communities.[12] In a letter to her friend which Godwin later included in the book as a part of its preface, Wollstonecraft describes Maria as "a woman of sensibility, with an improving mind" (71). Like other female English Jacobin writers, Wollstonecraft is aware that no matter how much Rousseau's idea of sensibility[13] can liberate, it can also limit, and she has to somehow contend with the problem of sensibility which is since Rousseau seen as "[her] sex's weakness and [her] sex's glory."[14] By the time Wollstonecraft was writing *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, sensibility had already been under attack for a number of years.[15] It is well-known that all of Wollstonecraft's writings betray a tortured relationship with the concept of sensibility and the conflict between reason and feeling inevitably imprints itself into her novels and her literary heroines, and *Maria* is no exception. Like Mary, Maria is torn between sense and sensibility, and her miseries with her husband and unhappy marriage have made her so susceptible to romantic wishes that "she frequently appeared, like a large proportion of her sex, only born to feel" (98).

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[12] Johnson 191.

[13] As G. J. Barker-Benfield states, sensibility of the second half of the eighteenth century was regarded as both a physical and a moral phenomenon. Physicians believed that the level of the sensibility of people's nerves corresponded to the level of emotional affection. And since women were considered to have finer and more sensible nerves than men, it was believed that women were more emotional. That also involved an ethic of compassion and sympathy with people in pain. Thus the discourse of sensibility was also inevitably associated with the arising female question of the eighteenth century. Contrary to that, too great amount of sensibility lead to the paralysis of one's body and constant suffering.

[14] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* ix.

[15] Sensibility, which had initially promised to bring individuals together through sympathy and compassion, was viewed as separatist, and asserting individual rights, sexual freedom, and unconventional relationships, it seemed to many people as offering too much political power to women.

When Maria was still a child, her uncle often brought her books, for which she "had a passion, and they conspired with his conversation, to make [her] form an *ideal* picture of life" (46; my emphasis). During her stay in the asylum, Maria shows particular fondness for books and reading. She uses reading to "soothe [...] the anguish of her wounded mind" (81) and therefore devours any newly-obtained book for she has "no other resource to escape from sorrow" (82). As Kelly argues, many women in the late eighteenth century took fancy in fiction as imagination's escape from "the impossibilities of their moral and social condition."[16] And just like them, Maria too wishes to escape the reality of her everyday life of being separated from her new-born daughter and placed into a mental asylum. Much like Emma Courtney, Maria gravitates in her taste towards more popular fiction as evident from the following quote: "She took up a book on the powers of the human mind; but, her attention strayed from cold arguments on the nature of what she felt, while she was feeling, and she snapt the chain of the theory to read Dryden's Guiscard and Sigismunda" (86). A turning point comes when Jemima brings Maria a copy of Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Again similarly to Emma Courtney, the book has far-reaching effects on Maria's mind for "it seemed to open a new world to her–the only one worth inhabiting" (88). Darnford becomes a personification of Saint Preux, a lover rather than a husband, to whom "she richly repaid [...] by donation of all St. Preux's sentiments and feelings" (89) and whose note on the margins of an impassioned letter–"Rousseau alone, the true Prometheus of sentiment, possessed the fire of genius necessary to portray the passion, the truth of which goes so directly to the heart" (89 - 90)–deeply touches her.

[16] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xii.

The influence of reading and Maria's imagination also seems to stand behind her marriage with George Venables. Initially, Maria wants to marry him for his charitable nature as she believes him to be the romantic hero she has so often read about in novels:

> [George] continued to single me out at the dance, press my hand at parting, and utter expressions of unmeaning passion, to which I gave a meaning naturally suggested by the romantic turn of my thoughts. […] [H]is manners did not entirely please me; but, when he left us, the colouring of my picture became more vivid—Whither did not my imagination lead me? In short, I fancied myself in love—in love with the disinterestedness, fortitude, generosity, dignity, and humanity, with which I had invested the hero I dubbed (129 - 130).

Her fancy for George finds "a basis to erect its model of perfection on; and quickly [goes] to work, with all the happy credulity of youth, to consider that heart as devoted to virtue, which [has]only obeyed a virtuous impulse" (135). However, soon after the wedding she comes to learn Venables's true nature. A story similar to those described above repeats once again (thus supporting Wollstonecraft's major claim that oppression is known to all women). Maria's husband "seldom dined at home, and continually returned at a late hour, drunk, to bed" (146) and his "fondness for women was of the grossest kind, […] promiscuous, and of the most brutal nature" (146). She soon realizes that he married her only for the money promised by her uncle and that she was now just his property. She later confesses that she "could not sometimes help regretting [her] early marriage" (144), and even though her flight from her husband gives her momentary freedom and a possibility to "expand [her] newly fledged wings" (144), she becomes "caught in [yet another] trap, and caged for life" (144) in a mental asylum.

Contrary to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,[17] *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* uses a sexualized female body as a medium of communication as Maria embraces her passion for Darnford and establishes a relationship between them. Challenging such moralists as John Gregory or Rousseau, Wollstonecraft claims that women can be fully sexualized beings capable of their own sexual desires irrespective of the desires of their husbands, and rejects the maxim that women should remain in a loveless marriage and "pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions"[18] out of duty. As Johnson argues, Wollstonecraft thus "asserts women's legitimacy as affective and erotic subject."[19] Maria's decision to leave her husband seems altogether rational - the "delicacy in [her] husband's bridal attentions" (154) turned into "tainted breath, pimpled face, and blood-shot eyes, [...] gross manners, and loveless familiarity [...]" (154). It is not "the happy credulity of youth" (135) that leads her into Darnford's arms, but the urgency of her rational sexual desire for him that expands beyond social constraints.

With Darnford, Maria discovers the pleasures of rational passion - "all soothing affection, and esteem seemed to [rival] love" (187). It is Maria's liberating love for Darnford that makes Jemima see that feeling can still be noble and that feeling, "spread by example, is the gentle force that will open mad-house and prison and destroy the moral bastille built by man."[20] To connect the novel to the English Jacobin propaganda and

[17] *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* portrays sexuality as a masculine characteristic, and while Wollstonecraft argues that some masculine characteristics are universal, sexuality is not one of them. "Voluptuousness" is used pejoratively, especially when referring to the culpable desire of male vice. She also emphasizes the importance of companionate relationships and believes that passion should cool between two lovers.

[18] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996) 28 - 29.

[19] Johnson 202.

[20] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xviii.

transport it into the political sphere,[21] Wollstonecraft makes Maria defend her lover against proceedings for adultery, demanding divorce from her husband at the same time. Yet, she is very well aware of the difference in approaching the case of marital separation as suggested by man and by woman:

> The situation of a woman separated from her husband, is undoubtedly very different from that of a man who has left his wife. He, with lordly dignity, has shaken of a clog; and the allowing her food and raiment, is thought sufficient to secure his reputation from taint. And, should she have been inconsiderate, he will be celebrated for his generosity and forbearance. Such is the respect paid to the master-key of property! A woman, on the contrary, resigning what is termed her natural protector (though he never was so, but in name) is despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery (157 - 158).

Still, she refuses to consider "the engagement [of marriage] as indissoluble […] in case her husband merits neither her love, nor esteem" (157) - an engagement that Darnford himself considers "the most insufferable bondage" (157). At court, she feels "a strong sense of injustice" (195) when faced with "a false morality […] which makes all the virtue of women consist in chastity, submission, and the forgiveness of injuries" (197). Her stance is very radical considering she claims divorce and "never viewing Mr. Venables in the light of a husband" (197) again. Upon summing up the evidence, the judge, however, alludes 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 encroached on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles in public or private life—and, if

[21] According to Kelly, the trial serves only as a symbol for the Government's legal suppression of English Jacobinism after the Treason Trials in 1794.

> 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?—It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents […] (198 - 199).

And finally, he disregards any charges against her husband and even supports his decision of placing Maria into a private madhouse. To the judge (someone who represents the rules of established power, which are, as Johnson argues, very distinct from genuine social justice), Maria's demands of the legitimacy of her own feelings marks her as someone who is not of sane mind and therefore not entitled to the autonomy they claim as their right.

The concept of insanity addressed by the judge also calls attention to the complex issue of delusion in the novel. Maria seems not only to be a prisoner of her marriage to Venables, but in a large sense also a prisoner to "the delusoriness of love that chained her to Venables in marriage to begin with, a love that enchains her to Darnford as well."[22] Till this day, scholars hold different views of whether Maria is deluded in her relationship to Darnford the same way she became deluded about Venables in the first place, or whether their love exemplifies a mature relationship based on rationality; in this way, they simultaneously examine Wollstonecraft's own approach to the rhetoric of sensibility. A great majority of academics agree that the novel rather opens a new space for critical distance. Considering the structural form of the novel, more specifically the memoirs which Maria writes for her daughter and which are withheld from the reader until chapter seven, postponing the story of Maria's life may serve as Wollstonecraft's tool to show her audience how Maria's love for Darnford recapitulates the mistakes she made with Venables. Moreover, Johnson interprets the quote "what change had Maria of escaping"

[22] Johnson 200 - 201.

as saying that this love is yet another form of incarceration from which escape is necessary.[23] It is evident that Maria later shows great apathy upon learning she is free to leave the prison for "liberty has lost its sweets" (189). The seemingly perfect romantic plot appears to disintegrate even more when Maria admits that "[w]ith Darnford she did not taste uninterrupted felicity; there was a volatility in his manner which often distressed her; but love gladdened the scene" (192). Even before the reader learns that Darnford eventually deserts Maria, the narrator unquestionably condemns his behaviour: "A fondness for the sex often gives an appearance of humanity to the behaviour of men, who have small pretensions to the reality; and they seem to love others, when they are only pursuing their own gratification" (192). Using this route of interpretation, Wollstonecraft seems to return to all the previously-mentioned examples of disastrous marriages and relationships, and show that indeed all women are wronged by men in the same way.

In his preface to the novel, Godwin states that Wollstonecraft gave careful and detailed consideration to the formal structure of *The Wrongs of Woman*: "The purpose and structure of the following work had long formed a favourite subject of meditation with its author, and she judged them capable of producing an important effect" (71). As Elizabeth A. Dolan argues, the connection of the purpose of the novel and its structure is implied already in the author's preface to the novel. There she hopes her readers will understand that her narrative is not limited only to her life experience, but that it rather presents a range of sufferings and "wrongs of different classes of women" (74). To achieve this goal, Wollstonecraft develops a specific narrative structure consisting, as Dolan further asserts, of repetitive "sketches" based on "the episodic form of children's literature."[24] Using a set of embedded narratives, Maria and Jemima incorporate into their tales stories

[23] Johnson 203.

[24] Elizabeth A. Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008) 197.

of a number of other suffering women. As Dolan claims, those portraits of women's lives are not gracefully woven into the plot but rather resemble Ashley Tauchert's Chinese boxes of women's stories. All those narratives work together to tell the story of female oppression under patriarchy; they all conclude that oppression is faced by all women alike, irrespective of their social class or economic position.

As relationships between men and women display a high inherent level of social inequality (up to the point when it leaves absolute impossibility of any satisfactory heterosexual relationships for women), Wollstonecraft endeavours to formulate a new kind of relationship based on friendship, more specifically motherhood and sisterhood. Already in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that rational friendship should replace love: "Friendship is a serious affection; the most sublime of all affections because it is founded on principles, and cemented by time. The very reverse may be said of love."[25] As Kelly argues, the only escape from the prison (and the prison of marriage as well) seems to be possible only through women's friendship and loyalty to each other.[26] With Jemima being the one liberating Maria from the prison, Wollstonecraft appears to reject the traditional romantic plot ending in a marriage and invents a new kind of family, one constituted by two mothers for Maria's child: "I [Maria] will teach her to consider you [Jemima] as her second mother" (121). Wollstonecraft envisions motherhood as a liberating role for women, one in which they can find usefulness, and ascribed it high importance. When Jemima reappears in the last fragment with Maria's lost daughter, whom she taught to say "Mamma!" (203), Maria immediately decides to raise herself from agony and "live for [her] child" (203).

[25] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 74.
[26] Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780 - 1805* 39.

It is nevertheless questionable to what extent Maria in the end gains her own independence for her despondency is hardly overcome. Still, Janet Todd argues that Maria's history is marked by two movements: "one circular and repetitive, and the other linear and developmental. The circular binds her to male relationships […], the linear tends towards freedom and maturity."[27] Thus, considering her relationship with both Venables and Darnford finished, her partnership with Jemima could be seen on the verge of achieving her independence after which she longed for such long time.

Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman yet again extends the English Jacobin's exploration of the parallels between the public and the private, the domestic and the political. Mary Wollstonecraft too was a polemicist deriving from her own experience and life, and mostly failed to make her fictions more than personal and polemical documents.[28] Yet, the use of autobiography was highly expected of the contemporary audience in order to illustrate the polemicist's abstract principles. The value of her works is thus very high. She not only includes contemporary observations on the Poor Laws, conditions of women's work, or the laws of marriage and property, but she also uses suggestive character names to imply that the things in history have always been the way they are in her time.[29] For this reason, Wollstonecraft's life and works were almost inseparable. She tries to shape her feelings into the character of her heroine to see herself from a distance, therefore creating autobiographical fiction "more objective by paradoxically being more personal."[30] While Wollstonecraft's arguments presented in *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* may seem commonplace in light of modern feminist

[27] Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 211 - 212.
[28] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xxi.
[29] Jemima is named after Job's daughter, Henry Darnford's name resembles that of Henry Darnley, the second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, and George Venables shares a name with the notorious womanizer George, Prince of Wales. According to Johnson, Maria herself is as much Mary Wollstonecraft as she is Mary Queen of Scots, prisoner of sex in the age of Reformation, and Marie Roland and Marie Antoinette, victims of a ruined Revolution.
[30] Kelly, Introduction to *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* xv.

concerns, they were “breathtakingly audacious” during her own time: “Wollstonecraft's final novel made explosively plain what the *Rights of Woman* had only partially intimated: that women's entitlements — as citizens, mothers, and sexual beings — are incompatible with a patriarchal marriage system.”[31] As Johnson finally states, “Wollstonecraft’s novels may not be masterpieces in the old-fashioned, traditional sense.”[32] Even though they are incomplete and clumsy in some places, they are “brave attempts” intended for “exceptional minds […] not confined by ideology” and for those who will be able to pass the imperfections and comprehend “both their despair of the present and their hope in the future.”[33]

[31] Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 235 - 236.
[32] Johnson 207.
[33] Johnson 207.

IV. FEMALE INDEPENDENCE IN MARY HAYS'S *THE VICTIM OF PREJUDICE*

> A Child of misfortune, a wretched outcast from my fellow-beings, driven with ignominy from social intercourse, cut off from human sympathy, immured in the gloomy walls of a prison, […] I make my last appeal from the injustice and barbarity of society.
>
> And thou, the victim of despotism, oppression, or error, tenant of a dungeon, and successor to its present devoted inhabitant, should these sheets fall into thy possession, […] read […][1]

Like Wollstonecraft's Maria, even the main character of *The Victim of Prejudice,* Mary Raymond, starts her narrative from a prison and her situation indisputably echoes that of Maria. Similarly to Maria, Mary writes her story to inform her readers about the challenges she encountered in her life, underlying the difficulty women experienced in gaining sufficient means of living and in their dependence on men. Her lament that she has become "the victim of a barbarous prejudice" (230) is not just a story of one woman's loss, but it also becomes indicative of a system of constraints, power and authority, which shapes and manipulates women according to ideological definitions of class and gender hierarchies. *The Victim of Prejudice* remains Hays's most feminist work as it focuses on the limitations women were subjected to at her time and does not hesitate to criticize the patriarchal nature of society, most specifically the exalted status of gentry.[2] She successfully rewrites the story of a seduced maiden, highlighting the emotional and physical pain and the bodily sufferings of her heroine. At the same time, she attempts to oppose the illusive representations of life and the idealization of a fallen woman as depicted in a majority of the sentimental literature of her time, making Mary resist her

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[1] Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, 2000) i - ii. All future references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

[2] Eleanor Ty, "Introduction," *The Victim of Prejudice* by Mary Hays (Peterborough: Broadview, 1998) ix.

fate and fight against her oppressors. As much as Mary is vulnerable to tyranny, she has nonetheless a strong spirit capable of resistance. The form of fictional autobiography written in the first-person narrative by the victim of seduction herself once again enables Hays to create a strong female voice to authenticate women's experience. Having been written at the end of the revolutionary decade, the novel thus exploits the general politicized climate to demonstrate the uneasy tensions between the traditional opposites of those with power and those without, between male and female, and between the oppressor and his victim.[3]

Similarly to Emma Courtney, Mary is brought up by her guardian Mr Raymond in a loving environment, separated from the patriarchal and prejudiced society of Britain. During her childhood, she receives quality education. Being educated alongside two aristocratic charges of Mr Raymond, Mary mentions that she "outstripped both [her] companions [Edward and William Pelham]: with an active mind and an ardent curiosity, [she] conceived an enthusiastic love of science and literature. Mr. Raymond directed [her] attention, encouraged [her] emulation, and afforded [her] the most liberal assistance (55)". His assistance seems perhaps too liberal; the equal education which gives her a sense of intellectual independence–a symbol of modest reform according to Mark J. Zunac[4]–is paradoxically seen as futile in the customary hierarchy of patriarchal society, being "unfitted to [her] sex, [her] situation, and pretensions" (56). Her childhood changes significantly with the arrival of William, with whom Mary develops a close friendship

[3] In connection to *The Victim of Prejudice* it is also appropriate to mention her proto-feminist tract *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* which is often compared to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* The tract offers evidence of women's oppression taken from female experiences of everyday life, rather than from a purely theoretical point of view. Hays's emphasis on the particular is then evident in *The Victim of Prejudice* in its emphasis on the physical suffering of Mary Raymond.

[4] Mark J. Zunac, "'The Dear-Bought Lessons of Experience': Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* and the Empiricist Revision of Burke's *Reflections*," *PPL*: 76, <http://blogs.uww.edu/zunac/files/2013/02/Published-copy.pdf> 3 Aug 2015.

and who she becomes genuinely fond of. Their innocent, yet romantic, bond is based

solely on companionship and mutual esteem.[5] However, seeing their budding romance, Mr Raymond feels the necessity to separate them in order to keep his promise to William's father to preserve William "from forming any improper acquaintance, or humiliating connections, which might tend to interfere with his views for their future dignity and advancement" (12 - 13). He explains that "[w]ere it not for certain prejudices, which the world has agreed to respect and to observe, [he] should perceive [Mary's] growing tenderness with delight, and hail it as the presage and the security of virtue; [...] but the imperious usages of society, with a stern voice, now command [them] to pause" (71 - 72). For those "certain prejudices" he crushes all Mary's hopes for marrying William, saying: "You can never be the wife of William Pelham" (73).

Such a claim logically does not make do without a proper explanation. Mr Raymond explains Mary that her acquaintance is improper from the social point of view because as a child she was abandoned by her mother who had a reputation of a whore and a murderer. In response to the letter from Mary's mother, Mr Raymond himself calls Mary a "child of infamy and calamity" (170). Hays dissects the inevitability of ruin by tracing the impact of a mother's fall on the situation of her daughter. In this way, Mary becomes socially pre-determined to follow the steps of her mother and fall a victim to ignominy. Hays, however, uses determinism and the principle of cause and effect to show that the daughter has a chance to refuse the fate predicted for her by her mother's deeds. She

[5] In a reckless moment, Mary compares their youthful passion to the sublime love between Emilius and Sophia, which is quite peculiar since Hays, like Wollstonecraft, opposed Rousseau especially in his views of female education. According to Rousseau, the soft, gentle and feminine Sophia was perfectly formed to be Emile's companion and therefore dependent on him. One interpretation of this comparison could stem from Mary's reading (of Rousseau or other sentimental novels) and romantic imagination, which results in her desire to give up her emotional independence in order to foster her love for William.

allows Mary to decline the inevitability of ruin and challenge the prejudices surrounding her illegitimacy. To make her learn from her mother's mistakes, Hays offers Mary the above-mentioned letter depicting the true nature of her mother's hardships and the danger of sensibility.[6]

The story of Mary's mother follows a story of a seduced maiden, a "wretched victim of sensuality and vice" (148). Complying with the codes of society, the mother's standards of right and wrong are based on the traditional notion of sexual purity. Raised in close proximity to the constructs of custom and tradition, she is "[e]ducated in the lap of indolence, enervated by pernicious indulgence, fostered in artificial refinements, misled by specious, but false, expectations, softened into imbecility, pampered in luxury, and dazzled by a frivolous ambition" (152). Society thus created an archetypal woman of sensibility, whose submissiveness is considered her most valuable character trait. It is therefore not surprising that at the age of eighteen she rejects an honourable man, and "listen[ing] to the insidious flatteries of a being, raised by fashion and fortune to a rank seducing to [her] vain imagination, in the splendour of which [her] weak judgement was dazzled and [her] virtue overpowered" (153), she yields "to the mingled intoxication of [her] vanity and [her] senses, quit[s] the paternal roof, and resign[s] [herself] to [her] triumphant seducer" (154). After months of "varied pleasure" (154), however, she admits: "I found myself suddenly deserted, driven with opprobrium from the house of my *destroyer*, thrown friendless and destitute upon the world, branded with infamy, and a wretched outcast from social life" (154). This quote testifies that the seduced woman is necessarily passive and helpless, and without hope to fend for herself any longer. The loss of her "innocence" (and simultaneously the loss of the only precondition of public virtue)

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[6] Like Wollstonecraft, even Hays used her novel to show the dangers of excessive sensibility and consequent disillussions. The female Jacobins were generally familiar with the liberation but also limitations of sensibility. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Hays recognizes the dangers of failing to reconcile romance with reality.

brings her the loss of all dignity, self-respect, and self-worth, which affected her physically, emotionally, socially, and economically.[7] Her helplessness eventually becomes the reason and justification for her further sexual liaisons. She becomes "a monster, cruel, relentless, ferocious" (163), contaminating with poison "those unfortunate victims whom, with practised allurements, [she] entangled in [her] snares" (163).

Consequently, lamenting her "sensibility of youth" (168), Mary's mother, resolved that the sins of the mother will not be visited by the daughter, entreats Mr Raymond, her former suitor, to "cultivate [Mary's] reason" (169) and "strengthen her faculties" (169). This charge is to inculcate in her daughter reason as a rival to wanton feeling, the latter of which being the sole product of women's education.[8] Like Wollstonecraft, Hays laments the condition of sensibility as cultivated in women only to foster submissiveness and, as Zunac claims, "sustain the myth that women are naturally prone to feeling and men to reason."[9] She asserts that only equal education can make female pupils aware of the injustice bred by social delusion of women.

Being so harshly acquainted with "the manners and maxims of the world" (57) which make it impossible for her to marry her childhood playmate and companion, Mary soon encounters what Hays has called the "tyranny of custom."[10] She has to come to terms with the fact that her "poverty, obscure birth, and the want of splendid connections" (74) overshadow her beauty, virtue, intellect, and talents. Even though William and she seem compatible as a couple and their marriage would be reasonable, social practices differ significantly and Mary is thus obliged to separate herself from William at the request of

[7] Eleanor Ty, "The Imprisoned Female Body in Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice," Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s*, ed. Linda Lang-Peralta (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999) 139.
[8] Zunac 80.
[9] Zunac 80.
[10] Ty 142.

her guardian. Her seamy origins and modest station will in the future serve as leverage for several people to subject Mary to various conditions of servitude, sexual degradation, and constant dependence, so much incompatible with her intellect, talents, and independent mind.

Mary's first encounter with the systematic abuse of her natural rights comes in the character of Sir Peter Osborne, a wealthy landowner. His persecution begins when Mary is still an adolescent under the care of her guardian and, as Zunac argues, it "presages the more sinister assaults she will endure by the same hands later in the text."[11] In Hays's presentation of him, Osborne becomes the embodiment of patriarchy and aristocracy, whose tyranny and abuse becomes unbearable for Mary. Hays thus attempts to dispel Burke's myth of the benevolent patriarch as the adequate head of the residents on his estates.[12] As Zunac asserts, "the brute strength exercised by Sir Peter stands in for traditional conceptions of gender as the linchpin of domestic tranquillity and, by extension, civil order."[13] Osborne's perception of Mary's "weakness", which he automatically ascribes to her sex, has presumably originated in culturally rooted notions of innate female passions.[14] He views all women stereotypically either as a mother or a whore, alternatively as an angel and a mistress. Without any intention on her part, Mary becomes the object of Osborne's desire and he refuses to treat her as an individual with a free mind and choice of decision.

[11] Zunac 78.
[12] Burke argues that only the sanctity of the domestic family would preserve England from the forces of anarchy, the destruction of society, and the loss of natural heritage. Hays, on the other hand, saw a problem in his idealization of the male figure of authority, and set out to show how fathers and husbands could become despotic and abusive, and therefore unfit to be the heads of their families.
[13] Zunac 79.
[14] Hays sees those constructions as a degradation of a valuable human sensibility needed for compassion and mutual understanding.

Thus, apart from being the object of Osborne's desire, Mary also represents the embodiment of oppression and defencelessness. She is lexically linked to the imagery of a little animal, a hare, "a panting victim" (46). This corresponds to her later description of herself as a "helpless, devoted victim," "[p]anting, half-breathless with emotion" (128). Hays thus implicitly suggests that Osborne desires to sport with Mary in much the same way as he does with the hare, chasing it and eventually driving it to death in the guise of adventure: "[H]e beset my paths, haunted me daily, and overwhelmed me with adulation and offensive gallantry" (121).

The death of Mr Raymond leaves Mary unprotected, with only little money to survive on. According to the wish of her late guardian, she departs to London. Here Sir Peter Osborne continues his chase and contrives to have Mary taken to a house in the disreputable St. James Street in which, she believes, her new employer resides. Instead, she meets Osborne and is immediately reminded of the excessive dependence she was burdened with by the misfortunes of her birth and present circumstances. She recognizes the danger of being confined in the same room with her oppressor and reminds Osborne that he has "no authority to constrain [her]" (69 - 70). What is she, however, not aware of is that her mere presence in a house of someone like Osborne is enough to ruin her in the eyes of polite society and discredit her as yet another of Osbourne's victims. Sir Peter, well-aware of Mary's powerless situation, thus promptly retorts: "Whither would you go? […] Recollect the time of night, your ignorance of the town. In avoiding fancied evils, the fiction of a romantic imagination, would you rush on certain destruction?" (70). To restore back her public virtue, Mary would have to marry Osborne. Yet, the reader learns that "[w]hen, with lavish fondness, I [Osborne] would have elevated you [Mary] to a station by which the vanity and ambition of half your sex would have been dazzled, you repaid my liberality with coldness and disdain, and retorted the bitter complaints of

disappointed passion with haughty defiance" (69). However, her principled resistance to succumb to Sir Peter and thus surrender her relative independence is only short-lived and followed by his "brutal violation" (79) of her body–an act which will make Mary heavily dependent for the entirety of her life.

The story line cannot avoid its comparison with a long tradition of sentimental novels depicting a fallen heroine, mainly Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Eleanor Ty argues that Hays rewrites the Clarissa plot from a feminist perspective to demonstrate the real consequences of a woman left without recourse to the laws and protection of the legal institutions.[15] Hay criticizes Richardson's depiction of Clarissa's fate as portrayed too perfectly, violating the principles of truth and nature and abounding with superstitions and prejudices.[16] Instead, Hays uses techniques usually associated with realistic fiction to portray female sufferings as they were. Dwelling on the sordid details of heroine's poverty, unemployment, and starvation after her sexual abuse, she changes Richardson's "ethereal" and "spiritual" to her "corporeal" and "social." In using the first-person narrative and letting her heroine tell her own tale, Hays validates Mary's experience rather than romanticizing it.

As Susan Staves notes, traditional tales of seduced women relied heavily "on a romantic idealization of maidenly devotion to chastity, a devotion rewarded not in this life but in the purer world toward which the dying maiden so frequently turns her final glance."[17] The question of Mary's resistance thus seems to constitute one of the pillars of Hays's criticism. Unlike Richardson's Clarissa who accepts her fate of a fallen woman

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[15] Ty, Introduction xxv.

[16] Such sentimental novels as Richardson's *Clarrisa* were similar to contemporary fables and conduct-manuals. They are created ideological representations and cultural scripts that transmitted a set of assumptions or values of patriarchal society.

[17] Susan Staves, "British Seduced Maidens," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14.2 (1980 - 1981): 110. Accessed though Eleanot Ty's "The Imprisoned Female Body in Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice.*"

with resignation and equanimity, Mary Raymond actively fights against her oppressors who question her "right to exist" (143). She adamantly refuses to accept the "notion that a woman who has lost her virginity must necessarily be socially banished and must look towards heaven for redemption,"[18] thus subverting the passivity and submissive demeanour required of women in traditional conduct books.

Mary's plight simultaneously reveals the failure of the existing justice and legal system to protect those who have been wronged. Simply because of her mother's reputation as a whore and a murderer, her insufficient knowledge of London, and her lack of social connections following the death of Mr Raymond, Mary finds it almost impossible to convince anyone that she was brutally violated. When William Pelham returns to the scene, he finds Mary broken and ill, and nurses her back to health, only to propose that she become his mistress. Acquainted with Mary's loss of innocence, he sees her, much like Osbourne, only as a commodity, a vulnerable and easily obtainable body. Mary resolutely refuses such a proposal, saying: "abandoned to infamy and covered with shame, virtue still maintains her empire in my bosom: *it is virtue only that I love better than William Pelham*" (107).

After her flight from William, Mary attempts to find employment at several places, trying to work as a companion and a drawing teacher, she also aspires to learn engraving, embroidery, and even copying, but is rejected in all trades. For Osborne and William's father have ensured that Mary's reputation of a fallen woman, resulting not only from the incident with Osborne, but also from her time spent with the married William, will precede her wherever she goes. She, yet again, feels like "an animal entangled in the toils of the hunter" (143). All men she encounters view her not as a serious worker, but only as a sexual being, and are thus encouraged to great sexual forwardness. It is therefore

[18] Ty, "The Imprisoned Female Body in Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice*" 138.

evident that in Mary's situation the theme of economic dependence is closely linked to her fate as a victim and a social outcast.

The legal system of Britain seems just as ineffective. As Sandra Sherman notes, "the patriarchal concomitants of a loss of caste—exposure to sexual predation, a drift into prostitution, loss of 'character' and employment—were rendered as private experience, distinct from social phenomena mediated by the law."[19] Aware that "[l]aw completes the triumph of injustice" (167), Mary nonetheless struggles to accept the class and gender constraints that stand in opposition to the nature of her education. She confronts Osborne, saying: "I will appeal to the tribunal of my country; I will boldly claim the protection of its laws, to which thou art already amenable.–Think not, by feeble restraints, to fetter the body when the mind is determined and free." (81 - 82). As Zunac explains, the specificity with which Mary asks for legal protection is significant in that it utilizes and clearly reaffirms what Seamus Deane calls the "well-known English virtues," such as "reverence for religion, respect for tradition, affection for one's locality, and sexual fidelity."[20] She directly threatens Osborne with legal proceedings but he, fully aware of the real practices of the legal system and the power of his money, only laughs at her:

> Who will credit the tale you mean to tell? What testimony or witnesses can you produce that will not make against you? Where are your resources to sustain the vexations and delay of a suit of law, which you wildly threaten? Who would support you against my wealth and influence? How would your delicacy shrink from the idea of becoming, in open court, the sport of ribaldry, the theme of obscene jesters? (85 - 86).

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[19] Sandra Sherman, "The Law, Confinement, and Disruptive Excess in Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice*," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* (New York: AMS Press, 2001) 132.
[20] Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England: 1789-1832* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 12.

He taunts Mary not only physically but also through his language and economic power. He is confident that the authorities, the law, and the members of community would support him rather than Mary, a woman with no family and no chastity:

> Your beauty and unprotected situation may, perhaps, but still farther provoke the lawless attempts of our sex and oppose the sympathy of your own. No one, I doubt, will now receive you in the capacity in which you had proposed to offer yourself, even were it more worthy of you; such are the stupid prejudices of the world. What is called, in your sex, honour and character, can, I fear, never be restored to you; nor will any asseverations or future watchfulness (to adopt the cant of policy and superstition) obliterate the stain. (84 - 85).

Mary's situation thus makes it clear that those traditional virtues that she relied on have become mere pretences for "the maintenance of arbitrary power structures."[21] Hays shows how the customs of society had indeed corrupted the foundational principles of one's liberty. We see the system punish the victim of rape rather than the rapist for ass Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale remarks, "[i]n a rape case it is the victim, not the defendant, who is on trial."[22]

Yet, during all her toils, she remains loyal to the moral upbringing of Mr Raymond and does not lose her belief in the purity of her heart:

> "Let it come then!" exclaimed I with fervour; "let my ruin be complete! Disgrace, indigence, contempt, while unmerited, I dare encounter, but not the censure of my own heart. Dishonour, death itself, is a calamity less insupportable than self-reproach. Amidst the destruction of my hopes, the wreck of my fortunes, of my fame, my spirit still triumphs in conscious rectitude; nor would I, intolerable as is the sense of my wrongs and of my griefs, exchange them for all that guilty prosperity could bestow." (110 - 11).

[21] Zunac 89.

[22] Wayne R. LaFave, "Substantive Criminal Law," *Rape - Overview; Act and Mental State* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2000) 753.

Having been raised according to the principles of Enlightenment, she maintains as integral her belief that "[l]iberty […] is the truest and most invaluable good" (54). The striking differences in Hays's novel is that Mary's immediate reaction to the rape is not a belief that she is damaged but she tries to overcome her sufferings, believing only she has the right to dictate her virtue. Being a woman of sexual impurity and endowed with almost none of the virtues normally expected of women in the eighteenth century, she is nonetheless empowered by determination to repel those who would try to make her unwillingly compromise her honour. For the maintenance of that honour, although ignored by much of society, is the only sufficient recompense for her objectification and subjection to social codes of injustice.

Much like Mary, Hays also did not believe that female honour was necessarily equated with virginity and deplored the way in which the customs and society placed much more emphasis on the external signs of chastity and reputation than on chastity itself. More than once in her letters, Hays discussed the exaggerated valuation of chastity by society: "It is from chastity having been render's *sexual virtue*, that all these calamities have flow'd–Men are by this means render's sordid and dissolute in their pleasures; their affections blunted and their feelings petrified; they are incapable of satisfying the *heart of a woman* of sensibility and virtue."[23] Following Hays's principles, Mary refuses to be defined in terms of virginity, frail beauty, or penitence. She repeatedly asserts her innocence despite her lost chastity and presents herself not as a sweetly pathetic fallen woman, but rather as "a child of misfortune, a wretched outcast" (i), "driven with ignominy from social intercourse" (i). Her self-esteem represents the only thing left intact; upon her reunion with James she wholeheartedly assures him: "you indeed see me wretched, but not guilty; my innocence and my integrity still remain to me" (175).

[23] Mary Hays, letter #12 to William Godwin, 6 February 1796, New York Public Library, New York.

After having been yet once insulted by a woman at whom she sought employment, "[a]n indignant flush of a moment crosse[s] [her] cheek" (126) but she "remember[s], that to conform ourselves to our situation, when inevitable, is true wisdom, and the emotion was transient" (126). This particular scene shows Mary's unconventional virtue and confirms the author's "deliberate program of progressive resignation."[24] Becoming "familiarized to suffering" (133), Mary finally "submit[s] to undeserved injury with sullen resignation[25], while [her] spirit, conscious of its purity, [rises] with dignity superior to its woes" (133). She is well-aware that had she conformed to the expectations placed on her by society and married her oppressor, she would be now upholding certain social status and avoid being shunned by others, but she would be simultaneously compromising her independence and self-determination. Mary's insistence on preserving her autonomy leads her to remind Osborne that her honour could never be restored to her by such a match, and she therefore rather "yield[s] to [her] destiny" (205 - 206). She knows that in her strife for independence she can never overcome either the gender and class prejudices, or the materialistic and morally questionable society. Thus, she begins to view herself as nothing but a victim or a tragic heroine of sentimental fiction. Yet, until the end of the novel, she stays "intrepid in innocence" (186), preserving her true sense of virtue and rightness despite ending up in a debtor's prison and enduring unending attacks from Osborne. Reconciled to her fate, she writers:

> Involved, as by a fatal mechanism, in the infamy of my wretched mother, thrown into similar circumstances, and looking to a catastrophe little less fearful, I have

[24] Zunac 81.

[25] As Zunac explains, "The 'calm resignation' expressed by Mary in fact echoes the Christian model formulated by a number of Bluestocking women, who made great gains in advancing the legitimacy of female intellectuals in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Elizabeth Carter's description of Catharine Talbot's admirable coping method ably demonstrates the presence at this time amongst reformers of what can only be called a "righteous" resignation: 'With the weakest health and the quickest sensibility of her loss, she discovers the noblest fortitude and the most unrepining resignation, of which gives the best and the most difficult proof, by constantly endeavouring to set every remaining blessing in the most comfortable and cheerful point of view.'"

still the consolation of remembering that I suffered not despair to plunge my soul in crime, that I braved the shocks of fortune, eluded the snares of vice, and struggled in the trammels of prejudice with dauntless intrepidity. (213).

What Mary values the most is the fact that, irrespective of the injustice of society thrown in her way, she managed to preserve her inner virtue, her principles and self-esteem.

The narrative technique using repetition, double story line and two generations helps create and accentuate the meaning behind the novel. As Eleanor Ty argues, the link between the daughter and the mother, and the subsequent literal re-enactment of the mother's written memoirs produces in the novel much of its force and its sense of foreboding. Mary's life follows that of her mother's: she is systematically seduced, abandoned, and cast out of society. Through the replication of the mother's life in her daughter's, Hays shows how the challenging of the patriarchal system can easily become a form of female punishment. The attempts of both generations to rebel, oppose, and go against male will and desire only create further constraints in their lives. Yearning for more space and freedom, they become physically and spiritually more constricted and circumscribed.[26]

In this way, Hays adds a new dimension to the novel of seduction and to the supremacy of social order. She rewrites the narrative of a fallen woman as a story of social prejudice against an innocent and unjustly treated victim who preserves her moral integrity and independence throughout.[27] *The Victim of Prejudice* remains her strongest

[26] Eleanor Ty, "Mary Hays: Critical Biography," <http://web.wlu.ca/english/ety/biography.html> 8 Aug 2015.

[27] Anne K. Mellor, "Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the women writers of her day," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 144.

polemical proto-feminist piece with serious political overtones.[28] By 1799, when the novel was published, Mary Hays had already lived the more radical half of her life.[29] The period was also introducing a new era of social reform that seemed sceptical to the promises made by the French Revolution and pre-Napoleonic France. As Gina Walker explains, "[i]n the end, her fate suggests that Mary Raymond has finally learned what Hays was then acknowledging: that the distance between the idea of self-determination and its fulfilment was still too great for any woman to travel with safety or success."[30] Depicting the corrupt class hierarchy, the defects in proper ownership, and the social degradation of women, the novel addresses many of the injustices that prompted the French Revolution. Yet, as seen in France, such resistance to absolutism led only to greater tyranny, and Mary's resignation (which, however, does not equal defeat) is thus inevitable. Hays's less than hopeful approach towards the changes brought by the French Revolution result in the novel's sombre tone. Considering its harsh criticism of social oppressions and Hays's own belief in innate goodness and rights of an individual, the work can be seen as one of the most radical of the English Jacobin novels. Yet, it also evokes the imagery of a swan song as it reflects the author's disillusionment with the outcomes of the French Revolution and her leads to her subsequent resignation. For resignation was something the radicals simply had to accept. As Zunac concludes, Mary's liberal education and intellectual superiority signify the fundamental injustice of the

[28] The French Revolution brought a great wave of excitement to Britain for its strong focus on liberty and rights of man (which simultaneously also brought into focus the question of female rights). Several years prior to this, John Locke introduced his theory of man's natural rights to life, liberty, and property. The British revolutionary upheaval, however, also had its opponents, for instance Edmund Burke. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke attacks the principles of the French Revolution and anticipates its disastrous end. He believes that the Revolution is based on abstract foundations and such revolutionary notions as liberty and rights of man could be easily abused to tyranny. He argues for gradual reform contrary to the revolution, and instead of applying such loose terms as liberty, he strictly believes in the firmness and concreteness of inherited rights.

[29] Ty, Introduction ix.

[30] Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006) 194.

dependent status of women and simultaneously proclaim the innate discrepancy between the predestined manifestation of natural right and its absence in reality.[31]

[31] Zunac 98.

V. FEMALE INDEPENDENCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*

Published in 1818, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* belongs already to the post-1810 period and Austen's views therefore inevitably differ from those of the previously-analysed Jacobin writers.[1] The social and political upheaval of the French Revolution, which lasted from 1789 to 1799, has already lost most of its force. If Mary Hays's *Victim of Prejudice* shows disillusionment with the outcomes of the French Revolution and its application in Britain, then in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* any discussion of revolutionary politics is avoided and the war remains a relatively marginal concern.[2] Austen does not engage with the social protest directly but comments on the social situation from a rather distant position, for instance by using the novel of manners. Yet, while Austen formally conforms to the conservative tradition and both politically and ideologically advocates the status quo, she also includes subversive features that remotely resemble the discussion of the arising female question from the very end of the eighteenth century. This chapter will therefore analyse *Persuasion* specifically from those two seemingly contrary stances, paying attention to the specifics of discussing the female question in 1818.

As Andrew Sanders aptly states in his *Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Jane Austen is a subtle, yet challenging and inventive novelist. Although it may seem that her work stands apart from the preoccupations of many of her fellow writers, it maintains much of its time. She remains loyal to the established fictional tradition, presenting only subtle variations. She is defined in christianly conservative terms against current radical

[1] The post-1810 period was chosen deliberately in order that this thesis created a varied picture of approaches towards female independence. The novelists that were described in previous chapter are generally regarded as radicals and share a number of similar features. Jane Austen, usually seen from a rather conservative point of view, however, is approaching some of those features using her own methods, and contributes thus to the complex portrayal of female independence. Her comparison with Hays and Wollstonecraft is presented in the conclusion of this thesis.

[2] Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 369.

enthusiasts. Sanders summarizes this complex stance by saying: "Where new writers who had espoused Jacobin libertarianism spoke of rights, Austen refers to duties; where they look for steady human improvement, she remains sceptical about the nature of the fallen human condition."[3] He continues by asserting that the late eighteenth-century cultivation of sentiment and sensibility, and the new Romantic insistence on the power of passion, are consistently countered by Austen's ironic exposure of affectation and by a steady prevalence of restraint. Her moral message is full of ideological insistence on the "merits of good conduct, good manners, sound reason, and marriage as an admirable social institution."[4] She "never scorns love, but she balances its often disconcerting and disruptive nature with a firm advocacy of the complementary qualities of self-knowledge, self-discipline, and practicality."[5] However, it is also necessary to be aware of the fact that the main female character, Anne Elliot, stands apart from Jane Austen's other heroines, not only because she is older, a woman rather than a girl and past her single genuine love attachment, but also because her moral development is much further advanced and she lacks the faults and foibles of Emma Woodhouse or Marianne Dashwood. Anne K. Mellor argues in her article on Mary Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries that

> [i]n Anne Elliot […] Jane Austen deftly stitches together Wollstonecraft's feminist ideas with those of Hannah More[6]: Anne, Austen's ideal woman, achieves the rational, companionate marriage urged by Wollstonecraft and exemplified in Admiral and Sophia Croft, at the same time that she practices Hannah More's "profession" of caring for the sick, the needy, the poor. Throughout her novels, Jane Austen endorses Wollstonecraft's belief that the

[3] Sanders 369.

[4] Sanders 369.

[5] Sanders 369 - 370.

[6] Hannah More stood at the conservative end of the feminist spectrum of Wollstonecraft's period. She advocated the upholding of the status quo and called for a revolution of manners, a radical change in the moral behaviour of the nation as a whole.

> best woman is a *rational* woman, a woman of sense as well as sensibility, who seeks a psychologically egalitarian marriage. Within the context of the politicized discourse of the novel in her day […] Austen can be seen as a moderate feminist.[7]

Precisely this interposition of hers between the radical and conservative ideologies will be crucial to the analysis of female independence in *Persuasion.*

Anne Elliot is certainly not one to avoid her responsibility and duty as a member of the upper class. Austen is then by no means revolutionary in having Anne respect the values and traditions of the established social structure and class division. Yet, she seems subtly subversive in supporting greater social mobility represented by the arising class of the navy. When Mr Elliot expresses his displeasure with the new class arising from the naval profession, he also unwillingly testifies the increasing social importance of naval officers who constitute an active, hard-working, and prosperous "pseudo-gentry" rank:

> Yes; it is [...] offensive to me; I have [...] strong grounds of objection to it […] as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of [...].
> I have observed it all my life.[8]

Anne, however, counters Mr Elliot's opinion, saying: "The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow" (22).

Anne also respects the importance of marriage and making a suitable match. Marriage in her time means not only the consummation of a love affair; it also directly

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[7] Anne K. Mellor, "Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the women writers of her day," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 156.

[8] Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Planet eBook) 23, <http://www.planetebook.com/ebooks/Persuasion.pdf> 8 Aug 2015. All future references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

compares individuals, classes, titles, and accomplishments. The courting preceding the actual marital ceremony allows friends and family to offer their opinions on the appropriateness of the match. Thus, when Anne finds herself "at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in the profession" (31), Lady Russel feels it is her duty to express her dissatisfaction with a match that is undeserving of her. Anne therefore submits to Lady Russel's opinion and her own sense of duty to her social class because "Lady Russell, whom she had always loved and relied on, could not, with such steadiness of opinion, and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain. She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing: indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it" (32). After having been turned down eight years ago, Captain Wentworth strongly believes that any woman he marries will have a strong character and independent mind. Later, he learns to understand that Anne's submissiveness to Lady Russel's disapproval was neither "a symptom of weakness, nor cold-hearted prudence, but a further sign of principles and fortitude."[9] For, even though Anne believes in the importance of strong mind and independence, she is also highly respectable to her obligation and duties. She is convinced that, in the end, "[she] was right in submitting to [Lady Russel]" (297) because "a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's proportion" (297). Austen thus allows the reader to judge for themselves whether Anne's persuasion was a positive force in the novel or whether Anne was driven only by her blind obedience to the collective mind, being consequently deprived of some individual merits.

[9] Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 276.

Few would thus rate Jane Austen among the outspoken proto-feminists of her day. Yet, even in *Persuasion* she manages to include a number of subversive features interrogating the common ideas about appropriate roles for men and for women. One of such features is the unusual narrative premise of a love affair which did not culminate in a marriage. This is closely connected to the novel's depiction of spinsterhood after Anne turns down Wentworth's proposal. Not much scholarly attention is actually paid to the analysis of Anne as a spinster because she eventually marries the object of her affection; however, she also deliberate chooses to stay unmarried and removes herself from the marriage market, even refusing the proposal of Charles Musgrove even though he was "the eldest son of a man, whose landed property and general importance were second in that country, only to Sir Walter's, and of good character and appearance" (33). We also see her at the age of twenty-seven and know that "[a] few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early" (6), contrary to her older sister Elizabeth who, at twenty-nine, is still healthy, beautiful, and very much marriageable. As John Wiltshire asserts, Anne's unmarried position has also assigned to her the usual spinster roles: "Anne is by turns confidante, adviser, piano accompanist, baby-sitter and nurse; the most frequently of all, the listener, whether preoccupied or attentive."[10]

To use a spinster-like character was certainly a bold move on Austen's part for the contemporary depiction of a spinster was usually connected with negative aspects. Lawrence Stone states that in the eighteenth century there arose "a new and *troublesome* phenomenon, the spinster lady who never married. (my emphasis)"11 As Bridget Hall suggests, "it was not just the disgrace and the shame of failing to get a husband, but their

[10] John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 153.

[11] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 38. He also mentions that their numbers rose from under five percent of all upper-class girls in the sixteenth century to twenty to twenty-five per cent in the eighteenth century. The situation was a result of an imbalance in the British population in that period; England had more women than men and thus logically more unmarried women.

denial by society of any identity."[12] However, already in the second half of the seventeenth century, Mary Astell advocates in her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* singleness not only as a possible alternative to marriage, but as something preferable to marriage.[13] Dashielle Horn argues that Austen's discussion of spinsterhood in *Persuasion* is more complicated than its simple support or condemnation; she is proposing that in certain cases it can be understood as "a productive space,"[14] preventing women from the pain of an unhappy marriage, a lost spouse, or, in Anne's case, allowing space to heal from another kind of loss without being subjected to the pressures of the marriage market. It can be thus assumed that Anne, by willingly placing herself into a spinster figure, asserts her right for choosing her husband and preserving her emotional independence.

From the narrative point of view, Anna represents an exclusively subjective viewpoint. As Marilyn Butler asserts, "the action and most of the characters in *Persuasion* seem meaningful primarily in terms of the impression they make upon Anne."[15] We see much of the action from Anne's point of view and become deeply involved in her emotions and her selective view of external reality. Her narrative is so all-absorbing that the reader cannot help but emotionally identify themselves with Anne. Anne's key interpretative role in the narrative is, however, in sharp contrast not only to her initial peripheral place in her social circle, but also to her marginal role as the novel's heroine. Several chapters actually pass before the heroine comes into the focus of the story. At first, Anne embodies only a notably silent observer. Only in chapter 4 does she become the subject of the narrative, yet even then she has no dramatic presence, she does not

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[12] Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England (*Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) 229.

[13] Susan S. Lanser, "Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid," *Singlewomen in the European Past*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 299.

[14] Dashielle Horn, "An Early Loss of Bloom: Spinsters, Old Maids, and the Marriage Market in *Persuasion*," (Lehigh: Lehigh University, 2012) 3, <http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2107&conte xt=etd> 8 Aug 2015.

[15] Butler 276.

speak and is basically held at distance. As the story line unfolds, Anne gradually takes a more central position: As Wiltshire observes, in volume II, her responses are less ignored and more aptly represented within the narrative.[16] Simultaneously to the rise of her participation in the narrative line, her confidence enhances as well, she becomes less and less confined only to the responsive role and begins to voice her opinions: "My idea of good company, Mr Elliot, is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation; that is what I call good company" (178). Such assertiveness in the presence of her father testifies not only her arising narrative development but psychological as well. This all culminates in her dialogue with Harville at the White Hart where she becomes the focus of attention in the room: "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one; you need not cover it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (284). This formal, as well as emotional, climactic scene resolves all tension built in the course of the narrative and Anne deservedly gains her place as a heroine. "How eloquent could Anne Elliot have been!" (35) – from a dependent listener became an independent speaker. Anne's journey through the novel is thus not concerned with moral growth, for she is perfect already from the beginning, but it describes Anne's way to finding her own voice and developing her confidence to state her opinions.

Despite the ideologically constructed feature of gender that Austen seems to have accepted, she moves her female heroines toward wider social and economic engagement, and towards usefulness. Women were generally most useful when contributing to the good of their families, communities, and societies.[17] However, being useful also gave women a specific kind of freedom. Charles J. Rzepka argues that in *Persuasion* Austen

[16] Wiltshire 80.
[17] Charles J. Rzepka, "Making it in a Brave New World: Marriage, Profession, and Anti-Romantic 'Ekstasis' in Austen's 'Persuasion,'" *Studies in the Novel* 26.1/2 (1994): 144, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533000> 8 Aug 2015.

points up the natural affinities between Anne's desire to be of use through the exercise of her nurturing and healing skills, her personal domestic virtues, and the national importance or the utility of the profession she is destined to join, that is to say to become "a sailor's wife" (304).[18] Another source of female usefulness is a woman's active engagement in economy in terms of them being the managers of the family budget. As Rzepka mentions, "[i]n *Persuasion*, the highest type of self-realization, for women as for men, seems to be comprised in the notion of active contribution, not in claims to individual rights and privileged, not to freedom of self-assertion and self-expression […] [T]he fullest realization can be achieved only by enhancing the individual's opportunities for 'usefulness.'"[19]Anne, her deceased mother and Lady Russel all demonstrate sound principles of domestic management. We know of Lady Elliot's "judgement and conduct […] [which] never required indulgence afterwards" (5), and Lady Russel together with Anne manifest their skilsl of economic management when dealing with Sir Walter's financial problems: Lady Russel "[draws] up plans of economy" (14) and makes "exact calculations" (14), while Anne "want[s] more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for everything but justice and equity" (14).

Yet, it is also important to take into account Austen's increasing sympathy with Evangelism that is directly relevant here. As Copeland points out, the role of women as efficient managers of the family budget was an ideal that was frequently promoted in contemporary Evangelical tracts, focusing on the need to better educate women for the duties of family and home. Similar principles were also found in so-called "household guides" to domestic management that circulated widely among the members of the

[18] Rzepka 109.
[19] Rzepka 108.

middle class.[20] Thus, we yet again see Austen standing in between traditional concepts and its subversions.

Yet, Austen still manages to come with what Rzepka calles "the 'third' sphere,"[21] that is to say with a single woman in a community of other women. He focuses his attention on the minor character of Nurse Rooke, a widow who manages to transform her nurturing skills into a "marketable commodity."[22] She belongs to a class of independent "professionals," those hired as private nurses by wealthy patients to take care of them. She not only supports herself through the profession of healing, but she also makes it possible for others, such as Mrs Smith, to make an independent living like her by teaching them useful skills. Together with her sister and Mrs Smith, Nurse Rooke comprises a "wholly female, self-sufficient community whose 'usefulness,' in strictly economic terms, is registered not in the deferred form of thrift and management but in the direct form of earned income–professional fees, rents, and productive employment."[23] This minor figure embodies Austen's idea of her own particular use to society as a professional, unmarried woman writer.[24]

The rise of women as active managers of the family income also sees Austen challenging the prevailing notion of separate spheres in which the male would be traditionally in charge of the public domain, dealing for instance with finances or legal matters, and the female would manage the private domain, running the household or ordering the servants.[25] In *Persuasion*, it is the Crofts who embody a vision of transformed roles. They exemplify a happy, ideal marriage, in which they both share their

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[20] Edward Copeland, "Jane Austen and the Consumer Revolution," *The Jane Austen Companion* (New York: Macmillan, 1986) 85.
[21] Rzepka 109.
[22] Rzepka 109.
[23] Rzepka 113.
[24] Rzepka 109 - 110.
[25] The concept of separate spheres has already been described in the introductory chapter, page 5.

prospective spheres: Mrs Croft joins his husband at sea and Admiral Croft is always happy to spend his time with his family and help his wife with chores around the household. The intensity of their partnership is presented in their sharing the task of driving a carriage, which Anne observes as an emblem of ideal marital cooperation:

> by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself they happily passed the danger; and by once afterwards judiciously putting out her hand they neither fell into a rut, nor ran foul of a dung-cart; and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the Cottage (110).

In connection to the Crofts, it is probably suitable to look at Anne's future situation as "a sailor's wife" (304):

> Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less, the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance (304).

Nina Auerbach maintains that Anne will be liberated like Mrs Croft and go to sea with her new husband.[26] Mrs Croft certainly finds her happiness at sea as she herself says: "I can safely say, that the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship. While we [the Crofts] were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared" (84). To this she adds:

> The only time I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter that I passed

[26] Nina Auerbach, "O Brave New Worls: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion,*" *ELH* 39 (1972): 114. The source was accessed through Rzepka's "Making it in a Brave New World: Marriage, Profession, and Anti-Romantic 'Ekstasis' in Austen's 'Persuasion.'"

> by myself at Deal, when the Admiral (Captain Croft then) was in the North Seas. I lived in perpetual fright at that time, and had all manner of imaginary complaints from not knowing what to do with myself, or when I should hear from him next; but as long as we could be together, nothing ever ailed me (85).

However, Rzepka argues that there is little in *Persuasion* to suggest that Anne Wentworth will follow in the footsteps of Mrs Croft irrespective of Anne's respect towards her. With Anne being something of a surrogate mother to her sister's children, he finds it improbable that she would give up having children, for that was one of the necessary preconditions of living at sea. In a nutshell, the emphasis in Anne's enthusiasm with her future profession should lie on the last word: "a sailor's *wife*" (304; my emphasis). It seems unlikely that Austen ever intended to send Anne at sea. For in her conversation to Captain Harville, Anne seems to implicitly refer to the fated life of women:

> It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions (280).

Moreover, Wentworth does not believe women should be carried on board ships because they are too delicate and "[i]t is rather from feeling how impossible it is, with all one's efforts, and all one's sacrifices, to make the accommodations on board such as women ought to have" (82). He thus resolutely states: "I hate to hear of women on board, or to see them on board; and no ship under my command shall ever convey a family of ladies anywhere, if I can help it" (82). Anne's place is then at home where she can take care for her husband, raise her children and live in "dread of a future war" (304).

Although Marilyn Butler views Jane Austen as ideologically conservative for her indisputable debt to the conventions of the eighteenth-century fiction and a persistent use of familiar topics of love and marriage in a limited domestic setting, her use of subversive features in the plot line is difficult to overlook. Her subversions are none of the openly radical, proto-feminist critiques of the position of women; yet, Austen still manages to toy with the established separate spheres, her view of unmarried women and the possibility of female engagement in work and economy. Anne's sense of duty and social order is evident and so is her search for rational, compassionate marriage. For this reason, Jane Austen surely cannot be omitted from the discussion on female independence between 1795 and 1820.

VI. CONCLUSION

The 1790s saw a distinctive change in the framework of women's protests against the injustice they faced. The political upheaval of the French Revolution and its debates about liberty and political rights brought the first intensive discussion of female emancipation and the concept was quickly adopted by female writers seeking social reform. The new political and philosophical movement of English Jacobinism introduced revolutionary proto-feminist doctrines of such authors as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays. However, it soon became evident that even though the period offered women possibilities for emancipation and citizenship, they would never gain political and economic freedoms reserved for men. This calls to mind the introductory imagery of the bird in a cage: even though women had the possibility to fly from their restrictive social cages, bars were persistently blocking their way out. The themes of disillusionment and resignation would then appear in the works of previously radical authors. And as the time moves past 1810, the wave of revolutionary ideals loses much of its force.

To describe this turbulent era and its influence on the literary portrayal of female independence, this thesis systematically analyses four novels of three different, yet also very similar, female author and attempts to gather the most varied and complex view of the approaches to the question of female emancipation. In those analyses we can clearly see rising radical tendencies from the portrayal of Emma Courtney's consuming passion for Augustus Harley, past Maria's unwilling imprisonment in a madhouse and her love affair with Darnford, past Jemima's suffering, servitude and prostitution, to Mary's tyrannical abuse and social persecution. Moving almost twenty years ahead, Jane Austen's Anne Elliot represents a joint between the conservative sense of duty and

respect for established customs, and subversive concepts of spinsterhood, partnership and female active involvement in society and economy.

When we compare Hays's and Wollstonecraft's ideologies with their novel, we spot obvious similarities. Their works are mostly polemical, devoted to public issues but derived from personal experience and beliefs. Many of the English Jacobins were not able to transcend their personal commitment to a specific principle for creative imagination and their works were not more than personal and political documents commenting on the contemporary political and social situation. Contrary to that, in 1818, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* avoids any discussion of revolutionary politics. Yet, her novels are also highly limited to her own experience with specific locations and social classes, and she hardly even transgresses those set boundaries.

In any discussion of female emancipation, Mary Wollstonecraft assumes a central position. During the early 1790s, she called loudly for a social reform concerning female manners, and her stances were immediately adopted by a number of her female contemporaries. Mary Hays shared much of Wollstonecraft's opinions on the necessity of improving the position of women in society. She endorsed most of Wollstonecraft's radical views, attacking the mental bondage and insufficient education. In both *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice*, she addresses principles similar to those depicted in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Some scholars even consider Hays as more radical than Wollstonecraft because she seems to be suggesting not only the equality of women, but also their possible superiority to men. The more moderate Jane Austen also responds positively to a number of Wollstonecraft's arguments without mentioning her by name. She places great emphasis on the importance of education and reading to train her heroines for moral growth, sound judgement and responsibilities as wives. Wollstonecraft's impact on the female writers of her time is therefore profound: they

share her arguments that women should be rationally educated, that they should be companions rather than servants, and that they should become responsible and caring mothers and prudent managers of their households. In this way, her ideologies influence not only such radicals as Mary Hays, but also more moderate authors as Jane Austen.

Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft are also connected in their use of specific narrative strategies, including repetition, double story lines and two-generation stories, which accentuates the political arguments behind their stories. Emma Courtney's story of her love for the married Augustus Harley functions as a warning for his son, whose sweetheart has recently got married and for whom he still has strong feeling. She discourages him from repeating her mistakes and falling prey to passion; she wishes to "behold [her] Augustus, 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!"[1] Similarly, the letter of Mary's mother in *The Victim of Prejudice* serves as a deterrent example of the consequences of succumbing to passion rather than to reason; yet, it only exemplifies a foreboding that will eventually come true. Through the replication of the mother's life into that of her daughter, Hays shows how the challenging of the patriarchal system can easily lead to a form of female punishment. The method of repetitive sketches is used also in *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* and their purpose is to point out that oppression is faced by all women alike, irrespective of their social class or economic position. Jane Austen's *Persuasion* works with a distinctly similar concept of a second chance: the two love lines between Anne and Frederick are separated by eight years and the reader can easily spot its difference in the lovers' maturation which finally brings them together.

In response to the tradition of sentimental novels, the three authors also have to deal with the question of sensibility. Wollstonecraft herself starts as a Rousseauist,

[1] Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Eleanor Ty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 196.

believing in the power of feeling, its supremacy, yet inevitable destructiveness for women. However, later she becomes aware of the disastrous consequences of excessive passion and moves into rational feminism. Like Wollstonecraft, Hays too stands on the edge between sentimentalism and rationality. In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, she portrays the influence of reading on female imagination and its subsequent consequences (much like Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*). Jane Austen then places great emphasis on rational judgement and sound reason in finding a suitable husband. To sum up, it seems that all three novelists accentuate the need of optimal balance between sense and sensibility.

Despite all the differences in the novelists' approaches to the question of female independence, what they all seem to have in common is the heroine's quickness to surrender her emotional independence to her desire of getting married and becoming someone's wife. Emma Courtney asserts in her letter to Augustus Harley that "[she] would give [herself] to [him]"[2] if he reciprocated her feelings. Maria Venables suddenly "[finds] herself happy" because she is "beloved."[3] Mary Raymond sighs: "Why can *I never be the wife of William Pelham* ? What tyranny is this?"[4] And Anne Elliot "glori[es] in being a sailor's wife."[5] No matter how much they strive for establishing their independent position in society, the eventually feel the desire to be loved.

By exploring more than twenty years between the French Revolution and the onset of the Victorian novel, this thesis attempts to describe the ways in which the proto-feminist thinking imprinted itself into contemporary literature and influenced the depiction of a woman as an emancipated individual. The novelists' contribution to the

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[2] Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* 124.

[3] *Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* by Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 99.

[4] Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, 2000) 83.

[5] Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Planet eBook) 304, <http://www.planetebook.com/ebooks/Persuasion.pdf> 8 Aug 2015.

arising concept of female emancipation is indisputable. The depiction of female independence in the established patriarchal society must have been in many ways a complicated and complex task and it is therefore understandable that the authoresses struggled with defining the new notions of femininity. They did not strive for perfection, they strove for freedom. And thus what is more important than ideological precision is their significance for future generations of feminists to whom their novels lay a solid foundation.

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