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'La fête des femmes: The feminine republic of letters in the long eighteenth century'

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By

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## Introduction

*'Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics.'*<sup>1</sup>

According to Woolf, the patriarchal repression of women's experiences, and the inevitable energy created, urges a necessity to reclaim what has been oppressed and to do so, primarily, with the pen. This dissertation will take the period between the publication of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405 and Mary Hays's *Female Biography* in 1803 as its essential framework, and the long eighteenth century within this period, in order to establish its validity as a time in which the creative force of individual women was not simply harnessed, but collectivised within a system of correspondence and association. It will be determined that this literary network was external, yet symbiotic to the acknowledged *querelle des femmes*, or the 'woman question.' Throughout this period, women were not only incentivised to write in retaliation to the proliferation of misogyny in literature, but began to do so in conjunction with a growing awareness of their collective identity.

The *querelle des femmes* must not be seen simply as a timeline of increased female defence literature, nor must it be seen solely as a period in which women began to think about the nature of *woman*, although this is no doubt an essential development, it nevertheless implies a lineal projection and construction. What must be considered is the networking of women prior to, throughout and following the publications within the *querelle*; a mass of energy symbiotic to the debate yet paradoxically independent from it. Although Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* has frequently been taken as the primary publication initiating the first feminine response within the *querelle des femmes*, what seems more symbolic for the purposes of this essay is the metaphorical significance of *the city* itself. The description of a city for ladies, carved out of the virtuous women of the past, in fact reflected a literary reality: women had a safe-space, an acknowledged canon defined by its femininity and collective incentive, which could not only produce literature relevant within the *querelle des femmes*, but could more importantly unite women external to the debate, primarily through reading and writing, communication and even friendship. Surrounding the energy of the

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<sup>1</sup> Woolf, V., *A Room of One's Own*, (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p.114.

*querelle des femmes* and occasionally contributing to it, was a network of interconnectedness between literary women that was hidden, yet in effect greater than the *querelle* itself: a *feminine republic of letters*.

The ‘woman question,’ known as the *querelle des femmes*, is understood by academics to have been initiated by Christine de Pizan’s first publications of female defence, at the outbreak of the fifteenth century. According to Joan Kelly in her powerful essay *Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes*<sup>2</sup>, the publication ‘gave rise to the four-century long debate on women concerning their evil and their excellence; their equality, their superiority and their inferiority to men; and simply their defence.’<sup>3</sup> Three fundamental features direct the intentions of the *querelle*; firstly, its discourse was invariably polemic, responding to published misogynist attacks and initiating a ‘conscious, dialectical stand in opposition to male defamation and subjection of women.’<sup>4</sup> Secondly, an inherent value was placed on culture as the commanding agent over biology in the formation of individuals, both men and women, although this strain of thought was inevitably promoted by the latter. Finally, the immediate intention of Christine and other literary women ‘was to oppose the mistreatment of women,’<sup>5</sup> and therefore contribute to the *querelle* by providing the alternative gendered perspective.

The embryonic stage of the *querelle* in the fifteenth century can be better understood by an explanation of its transformation throughout the previous century. Preceding the *querelle des femmes* were courtly depictions of women centring on themes of love, marriage and the chivalry and romanticism of courtly relations. The growth of a bourgeois mentality and secularism eventually provoked literary attacks against the court institution and everything it embodied. The position and nature of women situated within this society was not disregarded from the new realist critique and as a result, life and society were subject to distinctly rational interpretations, including a cruder, more transparent view of the nobility and noble women alike. Christine’s opposition to this development, from which she gained considerable support, showed

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<sup>2</sup> Kelly, J., ‘Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes,’ in Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago: CUP, 1986), pp.65-109.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, J., ‘Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes,’ in Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago: CUP, 1986), pp.66-67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.66-67.

not only a defence of the courtly literary heritage and tradition but, more significantly it created a new dynamic whereby the presentation of women within the novel was in turn critiqued by a woman. The dynamic became gendered and thus the *querelle des femmes*, the debate regarding the status, representation and progress of women, effectively began.

In addition to these contextual details one must also relate the publication of *The Book of the City of Ladies* to another critique by Virginia Woolf, namely that ‘unlike male authors, who always had literary forefathers against whom to measure themselves, prospective female authors were unable to “think back through their mothers” in order to assert their ideological and aesthetic independence from them.’<sup>6</sup> The use of biography as a prescription for the lack of collective history among women is a critical tool used by Christine de Pizan. The resurrection of women from the antiquity for example, and the way in which Pizan reinterpreted their social contributions and intellectual capacities in contrast to the female biographies produced by men, most prominently by Giovanni Boccaccio in 1374, supports the intention, noted by Gerda Lerner, that a ‘reinterpretation of past mythology and history might yield a women’s history from which to draw inspiration.’<sup>7</sup> Biographies have the ability to display depth in difference and experience amongst women; in biographies, experience essentially becomes the antidote to authority, the common prerogative held by men, and thus effectively arms women with the notion that their most powerful weapon against misogyny is in fact their very existence.

In 1803 Mary Hays reiterated this point by producing her six volume work, *Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and celebrated Women of all ages and countries*. This vastly under-acknowledged work is in effect a reinvention and renewal of the membership to Pizan’s *City of Ladies*, however for Hays, it is clear that the nature of being *illustrious* evolves, from one depicting kind, loyal, devoted and virtuous women, to one which depicts any woman who has excelled in learning, writing and promoting a progressive image of women. In her ground-breaking novel *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf states ‘biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or

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<sup>6</sup> Grant, R.B., ‘Introduction’, in Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, (London: Penguin, 1999), p.xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Lerner, G., *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p.194.

seven lives, whereas a person may well have as many as a thousand,'<sup>8</sup> and for Hays each life provided an experience that, when amalgamated, could establish a genealogy within which every woman could gain identity and purpose.

The long eighteenth century is the primary period of focus for it is essentially the most formative century for women, not only in their increased participation in the *querelle des femmes*, but more so for the intensification of networking and communication between women; it is the period in which the *feminine republic of letters* was firmly consolidated. The relevant historiography must therefore take into account the context of the long eighteenth century and the activities of women within this period. As a result, a consideration of the long eighteenth century context is essential, for it provides substance to the influences, provocations and stimulations for women in this period. The essence of the Enlightenment encapsulated elements of renaissance thought, which endeavoured to promote an eloquent society through education and conversation. Intellectual men of the Enlightenment penned their bourgeois utopias and the subsequent encouragement, critique or debate they inspired led to the academically acknowledged republic of letters; a domain of male intellectuals. The Enlightenment involved the awakening of men to their political and social situations and this brought into question the relationship between the people, the church and the state. The period was known as the *age of reason*, for 'reason alone would afford a total knowledge of man, society, nature and the cosmos.'<sup>9</sup> The heightened use of the printing press, in conjunction with an increased reading citizenship, illuminated by their literary indulgences, resulted in the detraction of focus away from the church and the King as the moral compasses of society, towards an empowerment of a bourgeois class. Not only was the bourgeois class given increased political leverage, but the ramifications of Enlightenment philosophies struck a chord even amongst those considered of the vulgar masses, resulting in institutions such as lending libraries and reading clubs, as well as coffeehouses and salons, emerging as centres of literary and political criticism. In effect, the public sphere was established in its most politically motivated form, and the term *public* itself took on a greater meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> Woolf, V., *Orlando*, (London: Penguin, 1993), p.130.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, R., *The Enlightenment*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.2.

This evident cultural metamorphosis formed the basis of the theory by Jürgen Habermas, in his seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. In this, Habermas expanded upon the tripartite structure of society advanced by Hegel, who stated that society was divided into three spheres; the family, civil society and the state. In 1962 Habermas radically introduced the assertion that there was a fourth sphere; the *public sphere*, which was effectively an informal association of private people oriented around society's general interests, which revolve around the state, the economy and other inter-group relations. Habermas defines the public sphere as the *bourgeois public sphere*, where 'private people come together to form a public readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.'<sup>10</sup> In effect, Habermas compels the impression that the public itself became a weapon, most prominently through the rise of the bourgeois classes during the Enlightenment, intending to assert the sovereignty of the public and to act as a 'tribunal of reason'<sup>11</sup> in accordance with the Enlightenment philosophy.

Carole Pateman dissects the dichotomy between public and private by making three key feminist critiques: firstly, the dichotomy fails to take into account 'women's everyday experience,'<sup>12</sup> which affirms the 'integral connection between the two spheres,'<sup>13</sup> as opposed to their distinct polarity. Secondly, post-war capitalism has been fed by an undercurrent of women workers, who have undertaken the dual responsibilities of unpaid housework and paid occupations, in contrast to male contributors, free to 'appear ready for work...free from the everyday demands of providing food, washing and cleaning, and care of children.'<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, 'the economically dependent wife has been presented as the ideal for all respectable classes of society'<sup>15</sup>; the improvement of women for the protection of the domestic sphere as

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas, J., *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), pp.25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Gripsrud, J., Moe, H., Molander, A., and Murdoch, G., eds., *The Idea of a Public Sphere: A Reader*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Pateman, C., 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy', in *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), p.131.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

the moral stronghold of capitalist society confirms how women are an integral and fundamental part of civil society.

Joan Landes, in both *Feminism: the Public and the Private* and *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, opposes outright the proposition made by Habermas that the subordination and exclusion of women in the public sphere was a result of their natural inferiority. Landes instead proposed that ‘none of this was the accidental consequence of the lesser status of women,’<sup>16</sup> but was instead the attempt by man to masquerade behind the appearance of universalism. Hilda Smith discusses this dynamic in great detail, in considering how men were portrayed as ‘exemplars of the qualities that broadly characterised human existence,’<sup>17</sup> while women remained only specialised to specific areas of discourse and public interaction, such as discussions regarding ‘sexual functions and relationships, in domestic roles, or as exceptions in public economic or political roles.’<sup>18</sup> Smith claims that the notion of inherent connectivity with masculine progression and political authority, and the patriarchal subordination it allows alongside the restriction and forced inferiority of the feminine, attaches a ‘modern false universal’<sup>19</sup> to the men in society. To Landes, the prerequisite established by Habermas, whereby participation in the civil public sphere was limited to male property owners, not only instilled this false notion of universalism, but Landes goes on to argue that it was not incidentally masculinist, but essentially patriarchal in order to enshrine the subordination of women within a public dynamic.

The academic interrogation of the new institutions leaves a variety of interpretations as to the nature and value of the coffeehouses and salons. Habermas stated that conversation in the salons was inevitably inconsequential as a result of the dominance of women in the initiation of discourse. Dena Goodman offers the most thorough rebuttal by affirming that salons were ‘working spaces,’<sup>20</sup> and the salonnières were intentionally and proactively political, aiming to produce stimulating and productive conversation.

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<sup>16</sup> Landes, J.B., *Feminism, the public and private*, (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.143.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, H., *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p.39.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>20</sup> Goodman, D., *The Republic of Letters: A culture history of the French Enlightenment*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), p.74.

The historical climate of the long eighteenth century enabled a variety of women to emerge as visible literary subjects through a process of networking and communication which I term *the feminine republic of letters*. In chapter one the extent to which a direct form of communication and literary exchange developed between the French *salonnières* and their English counterparts, and the process by which this led to the formation of a separate, anglo-franco feminine intellectual circle, will be examined. In chapter two I analyse the expansion of women's literary engagement out of the confined institution of the salon and into a politically galvanised public domain, and the way in which this was facilitated by the revival of a Rousseauvian philosophy in the 1790s. Finally, chapter three discusses how the utopian idealism that is a prevalent concern for women throughout the long eighteenth century culminates in Mary Hays's *Female Biography*. This source constitutes the most compelling evidence of the fact that women were beginning to view themselves as part of a long-standing feminine tradition which, whilst it was entrenched within the dominant masculine cultural framework, placed women at its centre as a cause for celebration. In doing so, Mary Hays established a trend that would inspire in future generations of women a distinct sense of their own feminine history and identity.

## Chapter One - The Coffee Republic: Women, hubs, and literary clubs.

According to Joan Kelly, the *querelle des femmes* cannot be acknowledged as a women's movement because evidence of women rebutting the 'misogynist voice of literate opinion'<sup>21</sup> occurred too sporadically in the timeline of the *querelle* to be considered as part of a collective entity. Instead, Kelly acknowledged those women who participated in the *querelle* to be individual theorists, rather than as conscious contributors to a collective movement. Indeed, it is inevitable that no clear women's movement can be seen to exist if the linear timeline of the *querelle des femmes* is taken in isolation. In a similar vein to Kelly, Gerda Lerner insisted upon the repetitious nature of women's progression in society, giving the endeavour to create a women's history a cyclical motion; 'women had to rediscover their history over and over again.'<sup>22</sup> This need to 'reinvent the wheel'<sup>23</sup> and gain 'authorisation through creativity,'<sup>24</sup> as opposed to experience and community, is according to Lerner, the very essence of women's subordination. If, however, one was to amalgamate the multiplicity of writing produced by women external to the *querelle*, taking into account the art of novel writing and translation, letter writing and correspondence between women, and the innate mobility of women towards the domains of and opportunities for friendship, then a considerable network becomes visible.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the climate that facilitated such a network, it is important to acknowledge the rise of a public sphere in the eighteenth century. In England, three factors ultimately transformed what was essentially a representative public sphere into a lively, politically motivated forum: firstly, the revolution of 1688 changed the political dynamic in England. James II, who inherited the crown in 1685, was keen to implement Catholicism along the same political model as that used by Louis XIV in France. This effectively promoted a 'modern Catholic

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<sup>21</sup> Kelly, J., 'Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes,' in Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), p.73.

<sup>22</sup> Lerner, G., *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.249.

<sup>23</sup> Lerner, G., *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: rebels against slavery*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p.135.

<sup>24</sup> Lerner, G., *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.167.

polity,'<sup>25</sup> which would be led by an absolutist sovereign, and promoted at the grassroots level of society; within schools, colleges, churches and through literature and the printing press. Fundamental liberal doctrines were discussed during this period, and according to Pincus, 'men and women of all social categories took to the streets, marched in arms on England's byways and highways, and donated huge amounts of money – some in very small quantities – to support the revolutionary cause.'<sup>26</sup> The symbolic impact of the revolution was to officially consider the mystic, sacred body of the monarchy as impotent, leaving only the ceremonial significance of the natural, living body of whoever held the throne.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence the social and political theory began to emerge which provoked the acknowledgement that the *state* now had to govern with the approval of those under its legislation. The *governed* therefore needed to form a *public opinion* in order to warrant the need for a social contract with the state.

In parallel to and in some ways causative of the revolution of 1688 was the influx of the ideals of Enlightenment. Voltaire, one of the most prominent Enlightenment philosophers, famously articulated in many of his letters the need to 'crush the infamous thing that is superstition and fanaticism,'<sup>28</sup> which was how many had come to see the divine, higher powers of the monarchy. The 1688 revolution in many ways gave impetus to the concept of popular sovereignty, however the Enlightenment created the philosophical motivation behind this political amendment; it was 'man's escape from self-imposed tutelage'<sup>29</sup> that provoked an increase in reading, conversation, education, innovation and a betterment of the race. As Habermas stated, 'public opinion can by definition only come into existence when a reasoning public is presupposed.'<sup>30</sup> For this reason the Enlightenment must be considered of cardinal significance to the liberation of a thinking public.

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<sup>25</sup> Pincus, S., *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, (New Haven, Connecticut; London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.475.

<sup>26</sup> Pincus, S., *1688: The First Modern Revolution*, (New Haven, Connecticut; London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.7

<sup>27</sup> Kantorowicz, E., *The Kings Two Bodies: A study in Medieval political theology*, (Princeton: PUP, 1957).

<sup>28</sup> 'Voltaire,' in *The Athenaeum: Journal of Literature, Science and the Fine Arts*, (British Periodicals Ltd [Originally from University of Minnesota], 1870, Issues, 2227-2253, p.299.

<sup>29</sup> Porter, R., 'Medical Science and Human Science in the Enlightenment,' in C. Fox, R. Porter and R. Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995), p.68.

<sup>30</sup> Habermas, J., 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, No. 3, (Autumn, 1974), p.50.

France experienced the same trends as England, though at a slower rate and without the same consequential development, made most evident by the French Revolution occurring after as opposed to before the fruition of a true public sphere. Habermas claims that France maintained a *literary public sphere*, which failed to mature into the *civil public sphere* witnessed in England, for two key reasons: the authoritarian censorship of the press which had failed to experience the liberation seen in England following the Revolution; and the ‘absence of an institutionalised forum for public opinion.’<sup>31</sup> Habermas’s state of nature, what he called the *Lifeworld*, was transformed by ‘realms of action steered by the media.’<sup>32</sup> Within these realms of action were what Habermas called ‘new institutions,’<sup>33</sup> those institutionalised forums that enabled public opinion to manifest itself, such as ‘the press, publishing houses, lending libraries, and literary societies.’<sup>34</sup> Habermas stated that these institutions were crucial in the formation of *the town* as a powerful social metropolis, by being ‘literary at first, then also political – in which began to emerge, between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals, a certain parity of the educated.’<sup>35</sup> The liberation of the printing press from the control of the state and church must be seen as a crucial determinant in the creation of *the public* as a concept. It became an invaluable weapon of the Enlightenment as the availability of the printing press meant that ‘friends, enlightened by liberty, could unite, communicate their ideas to one another, and compose their works someplace where they could have them printed and circulated throughout the world.’<sup>36</sup> This enlightenment through communication was by no means exclusive to the masculine public sphere, but found considerable use within its feminine counterpart, and those sections of society that women were able to penetrate.

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<sup>31</sup> Nathans, B., ‘Habermas’s “public sphere” in the era of the French Revolution,’ in *French Historical Studies*, Vol., 16, No. 3, (Spring, 1990), p.622.

<sup>32</sup> Habermas, J., in *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jurgen Habermas*, ed., P.Dews, (London: Verso, 1992), p.112.

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, J., *The Structural Transformation of the Pubic Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), p.32.

<sup>34</sup> Boyte, H.C., ‘The Pragmatic Ends of Popular Politics’, in ed., C.Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), p. 342.

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, J., *The Structural Transformation of the Pubic Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), p.32.

<sup>36</sup> Hesse, C., ‘Print culture in the enlightenment,’ in M. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Enlightenment World*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.366.

Mary Astell, amidst the winds of change at the break of the eighteenth century famously questioned ‘If all men are born equal, how is it all women are born slaves?’ According to Habermas, women were to occupy the domestic private sphere and venture no further than the literary public sphere; all realms beyond this were reserved for male, middle-class owners of property. Nevertheless, some women appropriated the essence of freedom enshrined within the doctrines of Enlightenment, particularly those women who were educated by brothers or fathers who submitted to Enlightenment philosophies. Consequently, the salons of Paris and the coffeehouses and literary clubs of London, as the primary institutions of the literary public sphere, became the essential domain for intellectual women. Rita Felski and Anne Mellor have argued there existed a ‘feminist counter-public sphere’<sup>37</sup> as a result of the strong presence of women, and essentially their dominance in the literary arenas of the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> By examining the Parisian salons and the literary clubs of London, and establishing the personal and ideological connections and exchanges between the two, I will assert that if there is an argument for a feminine counter-*public*, then there is additionally a legitimate argument for a feminine counter-*republic*: a *feminine republic of letters*. This chapter will focus on the institutional network that was established between Britain and France, considering the historical foundations they shared, and the subsequent direct connections they formed, firstly in terms of personal relations and experiences that both French salonnières and British Bluestockings shared, and secondly, the literary imitations that can be seen between the women of the two nations.

The salons of France originated in the seventeenth century as ‘an alternative space to the court,’<sup>39</sup> basing their construction upon the original Italian Renaissance salons. Although the French attempts came centuries later, they still mirrored fundamental characteristics enshrined within their Italian predecessors and which remained to the very end of the salon culture: ‘the authoritative position of the scholar, the unique influence of woman, and the tendency to set up *Platonic* relations between

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<sup>37</sup> Felski, R., *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.9.

<sup>38</sup> Mellor, A.K., ‘Joanna Baillie and the counter-Public Sphere’, in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 33, No. 4, (Winter: 1994).

<sup>39</sup> ‘Enlightenment,’ in M. Spongberg, B. Caine and A. Curthoys, eds., *Companion to Women’s Historical Writing*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.155.

the sexes.<sup>40</sup> The salons were divided in their embryonic stages; those women of the salons known as *précieuses*, were objectified as examples of over-consumption, unregulated luxury and extravagance in dress, morals and behaviour, everything a woman should not be. The society within these salons mocked the establishment by flaunting particularity; their games, language and philosophy aimed to be secretive and to dismiss the popular notions of universality. They were perceived, therefore, to be a masquerade and a falsity, and marriage and thus the restriction of women to the domestic sphere, as seen in Molière's famous critiques, was offered as the only antidote.

Public women in Britain faced a similar critique. On the one hand, 'a woman was not, it seems, unusual in a coffeehouse...to contemporaries, they were ubiquitous.'<sup>41</sup> Women in coffeehouses were considered necessary to instil their domestic, disciplinary and moral codes; to be 'angels in the coffee-house.'<sup>42</sup> There was a fear that although these new institutions were flourishing in instilling the need for public discourse and tribunal, they were not reflecting the Enlightenment ideal of self-betterment, instead producing lewd humour and lasciviousness, or gossip and talkativeness, which 'carried connotations of effeminacy.'<sup>43</sup>

Even if women were not welcomed by the enlightened age, as we have seen, they were still capable of being enlightened. As Carla Hesse elucidates, 'it is possible to be subordinate and at the same time capable of independent reason.'<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the maturation of the Enlightenment ideal of reason into the eighteenth century led to it obtaining a materialistic quality; aside from being an abstract, spiritual attainment of the soul, it additionally became a physical entity, 'a calculating process dependent upon the data of sense and reflection.'<sup>45</sup> As well as being a critique, and a 'discursive operation

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<sup>40</sup> Tinker, C.B., *The Salons and English Letters*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p.17.

<sup>41</sup> Ellis, M., 'Coffee-woman, "The Spectator" and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century', in E.Eger (ed.), *Women, writing and the public sphere, 1700-1830*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p.32.

<sup>42</sup> Clery, E 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth' in *Women: a cultural review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1991), p.172.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>44</sup> Hesse, C., *The Other Enlightenment: How French women became modern*, (Princeton, New Jersey; Oxford: PUP, 2001), p.xi.

<sup>45</sup> Voitle, R., 'The Reason of the English Enlightenment', in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 27, (1963), p.1751.

of mind,<sup>46</sup> reason had now, according to Deborah Heller's classifications, also become an 'interactive project.'<sup>47</sup> Consequently, in contrast to the disreputable, scandalous *précieuses* who were 'laughed out of existence'<sup>48</sup> by 1750, and the arguably libidinous women of the London coffeehouses, the British 'learned ladies'<sup>49</sup> and the Parisian *salonnières* intended to use the public sphere in their endeavour to seek, master and apply reason to literature and politics, in an attempt to enhance their own knowledge and personal achievement. While also being subject to the same gendered critiques and examinations as the *précieuses* and coffee women, these intellectual women 'both partook in and revised the terms of this dispute by creating a space – the salon – where women actively participated in the public sphere,'<sup>50</sup> as opposed to invading an existing patriarchal institution. Similar features can be distinguished within both national salons that benefitted not only the success of the salons, but also their ability and innate inclination to establish fundamental connections and communications with one another.

Firstly, the salons thrived upon intellectual expansion and development; 'wit, intellect and personality, rather than noble birth, became the key to social success.'<sup>51</sup> Literature was the catalyst of the salon, whether essays, plays or poems, down to tributes, sermons, speeches and letters: any form of literary production was critiqued and essentially trialled within the salons. The salons were not merely social gatherings but institutions that held significant creative influence; the hostesses, in their endeavour to learn and achieve intellectual fulfilment, thrived upon literature and aimed to exert influence not only on the product, but on the producer. Consequently, the salons were naturally democratic in membership and yet whilst maintaining an air of social superiority they nevertheless upheld their innate radicalism and rejection of aristocratic formality. Membership was open to anyone who could present progressive, enlightened, or even simply exceptional or innovative literature, regardless of its liberalism. The most important feature however was the hostess herself. With the nature of the salon in

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<sup>46</sup> Heller, D., 'Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere', in *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (1988), p.60.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>48</sup> Tinker, C.B., *The Salons and English Letters*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p.29.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>50</sup> Pohl, N., and Schellenberg, B.A., *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 2003), p.6.

<sup>51</sup> Tinker, C.B., *The Salons and English Letters*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p.25.

mind, it was essential for the hostess to provide the most adequate environment for conversation, the driving force of the Enlightenment, to flourish, for ‘the chief staple of entertainment offered by the salons is conversation, literary or philosophical in character.’<sup>52</sup> The personality of the hostess indicated the success of the salon itself, for it was her personality that coaxed the prominent Enlightenment *philosophes* and learned men out of the coffee houses and into their living rooms, as well as determining the extent of the salons’ radicalism and effectiveness. In a sense, the hostess ‘engineered her own education’<sup>53</sup> and therefore it was essential for her to be equipped in attracting the most progressive academics of the time. From a gendered perspective, the hostess was essentially recreating the male-dominated literary society within her own, private establishment; usurping the existing masculine literary community in order for it to benefit a feminine audience. The republic of letters was being feminised within the homes and chambers of the famous salonnières.

The British women flourished under the precedent set by their French sisters and this emulation and adoption of cultural tastes, practices and fashions was most affecting and instrumental to the *feminine republic of letters* in the seventeenth century. The seventeenth century laid the foundations for what was to follow and it was made most concrete and tangible by two key overarching institutions: the monarchy and the court. The monarchical connection between Britain and France historically, cannot be contested, and the significance of women within this institution, their power and influence, had three fundamental consequences for the *feminine republic*. Firstly, the French wife of King Charles I, Queen Henrietta Maria, essentially instigated the direct dissemination of the salon society into English high society. Henrietta Marie experienced and partook in the courtly life and salon circles that were in vogue in France at the time of her English influence, and in particular the extravagances of the *précieuses*. As Erica Veevers confirms, ‘certainly she helped to introduce this type of préciosité to the English court in the 1620’s, and it continued to exert its influence throughout the 1630’s and beyond.’<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Tinker, C.B., *The Salons and English Letters*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p.25.

<sup>53</sup> Hunt, K., ‘Women as citizens: Changing the polity’, in D. Simonton, *The Routledge History of Women in Europe since 1700*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.222.

<sup>54</sup> Veevers, E., *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and court entertainments*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p.2.

Secondly, the monarchy, and more specifically the female monarch or female influence, produced a strong symbolic admiration amongst the *précieuses* and French literary women. Henrietta Maria, her mother Marie de Medici, Anne of Austria and even Mary of Modena in the 1680's, all instilled a collectivising pride amongst literary women who enjoyed the power, or at least potential power, of women in the monarchy, primarily through familial relations and patronage. The 'ideal heroic woman'<sup>55</sup> was enveloped into the social model of the *précieuses*, and thus became a motif of female strength and a symbolic leader of a wider female literary community dominated by the French salons. Consequently, there was a proliferation of literary works exulting the illustrious women of past and present, such as the *salonnières* Madame du Scudéry's *Femmes Illustrées, ou les harangues héroïque*, in 1642 and Pierre Le Moyne's *Galerie des femmes fortes* in 1647. Madame du Scudéry's work is significant because it forms another integral part to the genre of female biography. Scudéry presents accounts of twenty women from the antiquity, many of whom Joan de Jean highlights as similarly referenced by the Roman poet Ovid, however Scudéry reverses his 'familiar tale of female amorous suffering'<sup>56</sup> by providing instead, outpourings by those women who have been misrepresented in history. At a time when the image of woman, and the female writer, were in constant scrutiny and political and cultural transformation, Scudéry provided her most potent display of female intellect by resorting to her past; Scudéry not only wrote a biography, establishing a genealogy of the *femmes fortes*, but she was providing them with a voice, as if she were their representative and they were formative to her own identity and contemporary situation.

While it is clear that the literary women of Britain and France shared a history, as well as a philosophical development, and that direct connections can be made between the transformations of both salons, it is nevertheless important to provide examples of when the French *salonnières* and the British ladies came into direct contact. Indeed, it was often the case that, in the same way as the men within the republic of letters, women would travel not only for cultural exploration, but to see the

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<sup>55</sup> Barash, C., *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community and Linguistic Authority*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.34.

<sup>56</sup> De Jean, J., *Tender Geographies: women and the origins of the novel in France*, (New York: CUP, 1991), p.79.

leading women in an alternate society. Chauncey Brewster Tinker provides the most thorough evidence of the direct connections made between the French salons and English ladies:

‘When, in 1775, Mrs. Montagu went to Paris, her associations with the Neckers became fairly intimate. She was presented to “all the beaux esprits (italics)” and was even taken to see Madame Geoffrin...she met Madame du Deffand at dinner, and found her gay and lively. Madame du Deffand’s comments on the bluestocking, in her letters to Walpole, are singularly indulgent.’<sup>57</sup>

This illuminating account of Elizabeth Montagu is evidenced further by Reginald Blunt, who states that, ‘though she had never yet stayed in Paris, Mrs. Montagu was by no means unknown there in 1776,’<sup>58</sup> when she eventually made the journey. The reputations of these women supersede their arrival, primarily as a result of their literary publications, in the case of Montagu her work *An essay on the writings and the genius of Shakespeare*, published seven years previous to her journey to Paris. However their reputations are also as a result of the *salonnières* more explicit relationship with male writers and philosophers, in contrast to the more feminocentric salons in England. Indeed, the connections between the salons of Britain and France were often cemented by men, showing that the *feminine republic of letters* had homocentricity at its heart but was nevertheless still part of the contemporary masculine framework. Blunt also touches on what is the most fundamental aspect of the *feminine republic of letters*, namely women communicating their experiences with one another. Following Elizabeth Montagu’s trip to Paris, she immediately relates her experiences to her good friend, Elizabeth Carter; on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1776 she writes,

‘I dined on Saturday at Madme de Guerchy’s and on Sunday dined and spent the evening at Madme Neckars. Monr Buffon, Monr Thomas and le Chevalier de Chatelux were of the party. They were all very polite to me and to our Shakespeare...’<sup>59</sup>

Montagu went on to write to Elizabeth Vesey on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1776, that she had ‘enclosed a copy of verses which Madame du Boccage sent me with a kind letter since I came to England.’<sup>60</sup> Not only does this correspondence depict the acquaintance of Madame du Boccage with Elizabeth Montagu, as well as their continued epistolary

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<sup>57</sup> Tinker, C.B., *The Salons and English Letters*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p.136.

<sup>58</sup> Blunt, R., *Mrs Montagu, ‘Queen of the Blues’: her letters and friendships*, (Constable and Company Ltd, 1923), p.312.

<sup>59</sup> Blunt, R., *Mrs Montagu, ‘Queen of the Blues’: her letters and friendships*, (Constable and Company Ltd, 1923), p.321.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.337.

relationship following Montagu's return to England; it also depicts the *feminine republic of letters* in action, whereby Madame du Boccage sent Montagu a copy of her poetry, and Montagu subsequently shared this work with her friend, and fellow *Bluestocking*, Elizabeth Vesey. These singular transactions depicting one woman sharing her literature with another provide the evidence that women were sharing and circulating their work among like-minded women, with the intention of gaining their approval, receiving critique, or quite simply for intellectual stimulation and epistolary friendship.

Even for those women who did not directly participate in the salon culture, they nevertheless internalised and replicated the communal values at work within it. Carol Barash calls these women 'English imitators,'<sup>61</sup> those women who attempted to make the French language accessible, and those who started writing utopian fiction in response to the homosocial values of the salon. The material they chose to translate is frequently significant for women because of its subject matter. Katherine Phillips, for example, translated Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée*, whose central heroine Cornelia stands strongly within the *femmes fortes* tradition.

Aphra Behn translated *A Discovery of New Worlds* by Fontenelle, which is significant because not only does one of its main female characters conform to the *femmes fortes* tradition, but the translation was one of many subsequent attempts by Behn to popularise astronomy and science amongst women. Fontenelle's *Discovery* was not only astronomical and Cartesian, but also philosophical with its considerations of rational life forms on other planets. In addition, *A Discovery* was written in the vernacular, which aided Behn's endeavour to popularise and anchor scientific and other philosophical work within a female literary community. Women had so far been denied access to instrumental work because of its persistent use of classical language, as Behn shows;

*The God-like Virgil, and great Homers Verse,  
Like Divine Mysteries are conceal'd from us...*<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Barash, C., *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community and Linguistic Authority*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.33.

<sup>62</sup> Hutner, H., *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p.42.

Subsequently, considering Behn's translations would highlight her perception of learned women as a community in need of enlightenment, but it also shows how the female connection between Britain and France enabled translation to become a method by which to unite women and give them access to progressive literature, hence why Behn went on to write,

*So thou by this Translation dost advance  
Our knowledge from the State of Ignorance...*<sup>63</sup>

Revealingly, Katherine Phillips recognised the value of translating women's works, such as Madame du Scudéry's *Almahide: or the Captive Queen*.

Katherine Phillips goes on to replicate the particularity and intimacy of the French *précieuses* by establishing the *Society of Friendship* with her close female acquaintances, which emulated the salon society through its 'female-centred world of love, writing, and court politics,'<sup>64</sup> and many of her poems envisioned a gynocentric community. The work of Margaret Cavendish can also be identified as a filtration of the idea of the French salon as an enclosed community of women into English literature, with works such as *The Female Academy* in 1662 and *The Convent of Pleasure* in 1668 reflecting the literary articulation of the desire for female utopia and retreat similar to the citadel originally promoted by Christine de Pizan. Utopian works by Bluestockings, such as *Millennium Hall* by Sarah Scott in 1762 and *Munster Village* by Mary Hamilton in 1778, began to show the potential universalism that the dissemination of ideas from France to England had created. Even the production of female journals, such as Eliza Heywood's *The Female Spectator* in 1775 could be portrayed as a literal community as it envisioned the need to publicise articles for women, by women.

The genre of utopian fiction is one that endures throughout the century and into the 1790s. In the years preceding and throughout this volatile decade it is harnessed as a vehicle for emergent ideas concerning the potential of women's unification and community. However, women's utopian fiction also became a subversive form of response to Rousseauvian philosophy, which outlined women's position in society as

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<sup>63</sup> Hutner, H., *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p.42.

<sup>64</sup> Barash, C., *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community and Linguistic Authority*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.15.

inherently subordinate to men. The 1790s, then, is a decade which sees a distinct political drive behind women's literary publications and desire to unite, a desire that becomes necessary for the advancement of women into the nineteenth century.

## Chapter Two – Rediscovering Rousseau: The 1790s and the sorority of revolution.

In 1789, the Enlightenment philosophies idolising independent thought, social fulfilment and freedom through reason reached a bloody culmination. The Enlightenment's liberal concepts were harnessed by the Revolutionaries and used to justify violent political upheaval. Although the left-wing forces behind the social and political revolt proclaimed *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, it was nevertheless a case of 'liberty by wholesale destruction';<sup>65</sup> the conditions for the French Revolution were firmly established, and its intent enshrined within the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.

The events of the 1790s created the optimum climate for the growth of the *feminine republic of letters* towards a more political and broadly social advancement. Although the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* outlined a tacit discrimination of women in society, by excluding them from active citizenship, it was nevertheless provocative in inspiring the retaliation of women within society who resented the citizenship status they had inherited from the state. The *Declaration* and the events that follow gave an opportunity for women to firmly position themselves within a contemporary debate about gender and citizenship rights. Publications such as Olympe de Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Female Citizen* in 1791, were written in direct response to the Revolution's mistreatment of women and yet became part of a broader and pre-existing history of women writing for freedom; 'tell me, what gives you sovereign empire to oppress my sex?'<sup>66</sup>

The French Revolution and the political and social years surrounding it were provocative for the developments within the *feminine republic of letters*, for three key reasons; it created a larger female writing population; it inspired the development of what could be called feminine cosmopolitanism; and the French Revolution popularised Rousseau's philosophies that women could collectively usurp and reclaim.

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<sup>65</sup> Doyle, W., *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p.3.

<sup>66</sup> 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen,' in <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/americanstudies/lavender/decwom2.html>, (date accessed 20/09/12)

Firstly, the 1790s had witnessed the move away from the intimate salon cultures, especially in Britain, and towards a broader writing public. The *Bluestockings* and the French salon culture had established on an intimate level the natural tendency amongst intellectual women to unite and collectivise. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, women's writing expanded beyond the elitist salon domain that had become, by the end of the eighteenth century, anachronistic in a society where more women from varying social backgrounds, were beginning to write. The events surrounding the French Revolution, and the subsequent developments within the 1790s, therefore provoked a distinct shift away from the exclusivity of a *Bluestocking club* and towards a more galvanised and politically engaged public, which was gendered female.

Secondly, it is possible to distinguish amongst the women of the 1790s, a distinct cosmopolitanism that, although a social prescription and philosophy that was at an embryonic stage within society in general, but with which women writers had forged a particularly intimate connection. As Adriana Craciun states, by examining the work of female writers within the 1790s, it is possible to 'illuminate the underappreciated extent to which Romantic-period British women writers cultivated a radicalised cosmopolitanism through their engagement with French revolutionary politics.'<sup>67</sup> The sense of connection established between British women and their French counterparts was the core fabric of the *feminine republic of letters*, and from this fabric British women developed a sense of *Francophilia*. The British women watched as their French sisters fought for their basic citizenship rights, and this threw into perspective the political restrictions and similar discrimination they faced at home. When situated alongside a consideration of the doctrine of cosmopolitanism, it is inevitable that a new generation of 'female philosophers'<sup>68</sup> would emerge.

'Enlightenment cosmopolitanism'<sup>69</sup> was a twentieth century term created after reviewing the emerging notions of globalisation and national introspection within the eighteenth century, 'exemplified by figures like Voltaire, Diderot, Goldsmith, Hume

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<sup>67</sup> Craciun, A., *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the world*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

and Kant.<sup>70</sup> Theories on globalisation arguably emerged following the publication of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World*, which critiqued the misgivings of national patriotism when compared to an international, cosmopolitan philosophy. In the 1790s, Immanuel Kant produced *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, which not only enshrined these cosmopolitan values of universalism, but promoted the concept of a universalised citizen and thus, the human rights that the citizen required. Habermas critiqued Kant's work, and forwarded the view that Kant had introduced 'an innovation with broad implications: the idea of a cosmopolitan law based on the rights of the world citizen.'<sup>71</sup> While prominent intellectual men may have articulated the first considerations of a global community and a universal citizen, their social position supports their entitlement to citizenship on a global scale, while for women in France and Britain, the same confidence cannot be maintained. For this reason, intellectual women could relate to the ideals of globalisation with a stronger personal commitment.

Female cosmopolitans can be seen from as early as 1718, when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu documented her observations and personal enlightenment from her travels to France;

*'I must tell you something of the French ladies, I have seen all the beauties...so fantastically absurd in their dress!'*<sup>72</sup>

Montagu's description expresses how there was a degree of analysis and close inspection of the French women and how they appeared to encapsulate a foreign style and image that British women were exploring. The ability to travel was in vogue among the leisured classes and aristocracy in the eighteenth century, and by 1779 Fanny Burney, an author and playwright, wrote of France as 'the paradise of lady wits,'<sup>73</sup> encapsulating how it had become for the female cosmopolitans, a spiritual beacon. Travelling to France and experiencing the subordination of the women in contrast to their proactive, yet traditional place within the French Revolution, which will be

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<sup>70</sup> Craciun, A., *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the world*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.2.

<sup>71</sup> Habermas, J., 'Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years' Hindsight', in J. Bohman and M. Lutz-Bachman, eds., *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1997), p.113.

<sup>72</sup> Montagu, M. W. Lady., *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, (London: London, 1763), p.118.

<sup>73</sup> Burney, F., *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay: 1778 to 1784*, (London: Vizetelly, 1890-91), p.197.

discussed, was an enlightening experience and an opportunity to discover a new way of life for the British female cosmopolitans.

A multitude of novels, as well as personal statements epitomising the national uncertainty the French Revolution inspired amongst British women, can be seen to proliferate through the 1790s. Women such as Mary Robinson alluded to the longing for universal acceptance in her novel, *Hubert de Sevrac*, written in 1796, which depicts a family and in particular her female protagonist, transforming ‘to become a perfect citizen of the world.’<sup>74</sup> The British were strongly divided over the French Revolution; writers who sought political and social reform were branded as irresponsible provokers of revolutionary morals, in accordance with the counterrevolutionary agenda of the loyalists. The female cosmopolitans were therefore brave to stand out against this backdrop and to support the French Revolution’s liberating doctrines.

It was documented in her vast collection of personal letters, that Charlotte Smith had, in 1794, written, ‘I have neither naturally nor artificially the least partiality for my native country.’<sup>75</sup> This is a potent statement, paralleling women’s sense of subordination and disconnection from Britain, alongside a strong sense of belonging and natural habitation in France. Although she travelled to France, Smith epitomises the grounding and deepening of the French connection: she needed to support her family and so instead of remaining in France, encapsulated the spirit of the citizen of the world by writing, producing *Desmond* in 1792, and *The Young Philosopher* in 1798. Helen Maria Williams was the most daring female cosmopolitan, having moved to Paris and established her own salon, in 1790. What Mary Favret has highlight about Helen Maria Williams, is her visualisation of the French Revolution as a feminine revolution, ‘represented by and as the women’s sensitive heart.’<sup>76</sup> Williams places her own female experience of the revolution as central to its significance, and her eight volume *Letters from France* read as an enticing call for the women she left behind in England.

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<sup>74</sup> Robinson, M., *Hubert de Sevrac: A Romance of the Eighteenth Century*, first volume, (London: Hookham, 1796), p.296.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, C., *Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, in ed., J. Stanton, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p.105.

<sup>76</sup> Favret, M., *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters*, (Cambridge, CUP, 1993), p.94.

The French Revolution stimulated British women's introspection and gave opportunity for progressive literary women to promote an oppositional stance and a critique of their own degree of liberation, within a broader political debate. On the one hand, these revolutionary women were ostracised from their national community once it was acknowledged that their feeling of exclusion was commonly felt; Richard Polwhele's famous *The Unsex'd Females* in 1798, galvanises the likes of Mary Hamilton and Charlotte Smith to Helen Maria Williams and the matriarchal Mary Wollstonecraft, as a result of their collective support of the Revolution. Unsexing these women was to disempower their collective fight for their sex, and isolate them as radical revolutionaries. The paradoxical nature of the poem, however, is that collectivising these women as unsex'd, is nevertheless acknowledging their unity, 'a female band despising nature's law.'<sup>77</sup>

Situated centrally within Polwhele's vehement attack is reference to an essential revolutionary catalyst:

*'What tho, the fine Romances of Rousseau,  
Bid the flame flutter, and the bosom glow.'*<sup>78</sup>

Rousseau was the philosophical inspiration for the French Revolutionaries, and his ideologies were instrumental in extending the gender divide in France as well as those other nations observing the events on the continent. Rousseau's philosophy, if it could be condensed, promotes the concept of the 'general will'<sup>79</sup> of the citizen, over the private will of the individual: the latter characterises natural liberty and slavery, the former compels a state of civil liberty and 'freedom to obey the laws.'<sup>80</sup> Within Rousseau's theory, man's natural state is in effect genderless, for sexual segregation only occurred through the creation of patriarchal relationships and the manufactured sexual differentiation promoted within a civil state. The creation of a general will,

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<sup>77</sup> Polwhele, R., *The Unsex'd Females*, available at <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-unsex-d-females/>, (date accessed 20/09/12), line 12.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, lines.71-72.

<sup>79</sup> Rousseau, J.J., *An inquiry into the nature of the social contract, or, Principles of political right*, (Manchester: A. Heywood, 1848), available at <http://find.galegroup.com/mome/infomark.do?sort=DateAscend&prodId=MOME&tabID=T001&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&type=search&currentPosition=1&version=1.0&searchResultsPerPage=10&userGroupName=unihull&queryId=Locale%28en%2CUS%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28RN%2CNone%2C10%29U106753291%24&source=gale>, (date accessed 20/09/12),

p.16.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

following the establishment of domesticity and community, initiates sexual difference and is 'predicated on the silent but tacit consent of women.'<sup>81</sup>

For the women of the *feminine republic of letters* and the 1790s female writers in particular, Rousseau created a paradox: he advocated the subordination of women through domestic fulfilment; his philosophies were read by the intellectual and aristocratic women he abhorred; yet the essence of his theories and the foundations of his novels were affectionately usurped and reclaimed by the very women he aimed to eradicate. By analysing the literary productions of the women who reclaimed Rousseau, it is possible to identify three fundamental forms of Rousseauvian revision: within the subtle novel; within political polemic; and within a condition, a way of living.

As early as 1767, Madame Leprince de Beaumont, arguably the original critical writer against Rousseau, published *The New Clarissa* in an attempt to overhaul the story of the *femme tragique*. Beaumont directly responds to the harsh reality for women proposed by Richardson, the author of the original *Clarissa*, detailing the forced marriage, imprisonment, rape and isolated death of Clarissa. Beaumont harnessed fundamental Rousseauvian themes such as marriage and the repercussions of patriarchal domination and inverted them for her own agenda. In Beaumont's revision, Clarissa escapes her father's wrath after abandoning her arranged marriage, and by marrying a man of her own choosing, discovers that his mother has intentions to create a utopian community, and that Clarissa could play a vital role. The utopia urges the assimilation of fallen women back into the community, and advocates an increased education and rehabilitation for those who have fallen in society, as part of a broader manifesto advocating a charitable, community-level restoration that was similarly applied in *Millennium Hall* and *Munster Village*. Indeed, the ground-level rehabilitation and grassroots development these intellectual women regularly advocated exemplified a new intent to popularise their vision for women. Although the endorsement of the domestic was intrinsic to Rousseau's agenda, it was nevertheless adopted in both novels in an attempt to empower the maternal for the benefit of women within a community, enabling their educational resource and their social fulfilment in ways which were not intended by Rousseau's original. The escape from patriarchal normality and the

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<sup>81</sup> Landes, J., *Women and the Public Sphere in the age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.66.

celebration of achievement for Lady Munster and more prominently Clarissa, powerfully counteracts the tragic downfall of the feminine in *La Nouvelle Heloise*.

The novel was safe, assumed and a seemingly unthreatening genre that obscured any display of female interventionism, and Fanny Burney's eagerness to publish anonymously heightens this subversive agenda. Following the publication of *Julie* in 1761 and *Emile* in 1762, Frances Burney wrote *Evelina* in 1778. In her preface she remarks that although men like Rousseau have contributed to her enlightenment, she nevertheless aims to avoid 'pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers; and, though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren.'<sup>82</sup> Although she has acknowledged their significance as literary contributions, she nevertheless parallels their work to a state of uncultivable impoverishment. In contrast Burney constantly attributes the character and journey of her lead female protagonist as natural and unaffected; an immaculate outcome of an educated woman at once usurping and twisting Rousseau's intention for the female. Furthermore, *Evelina* seeks knowledge through experience in London, the eighteenth century encapsulation of the urban metropolis that proved so corrupting in Rousseau's theory. Again, the attainment and intellectual significance of allowing a woman to experience, and to enable the vocalisation and celebration of such an enterprise is the driving force behind the development of the *feminine republic of letters*.

The critique of Rousseau within the novel continued into the 1790s, and in the case of Clara Reeve's *Plans on Education*, the recourse to celebrate female utopia remained a constant form of writing within the *feminine republic of letters*. Clara Reeve's novel is in an epistolary form, and reads somewhere between a novel and a political tract; the novel documented the letters written between Mrs Frances Darnford and 'Lady A', and the nature of their letters was regarding Mrs Darnford's plans for education within her project to establish a female convent with an acquaintance. Within the letters, Reeve is able to aptly summarise the opinion of literary women regarding Rousseau;

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<sup>82</sup> Burney, F., *Evelina: or, A young lady's entrance into the world. A novel, volume one*, (London: Printed for A.K. Newman & Co., Leadenhall Street, 1829), p.viii.

*'in his writings are many excellent and admirable things, and it is much to be wished that the grain could be separated from the chaff.'*<sup>83</sup>

Here, Reeve clearly highlights the value of experience and its strength as a tool in critiquing Rousseau's theories on education and furthermore, by going on to present a series of letters that outline a clear and concise plan for education, Reeve is seen to be displaying her equal ability as a woman, to educate. What is most illuminating about Reeve's *Plans on Education* is her constant reference to the Frenchwoman Madame de Maintenon, as her example. Reeve, through Mrs Darnford, claims that those who run seminaries of education should be a natural parent of the people, and Reeve cites Madame de Maintenon as the first example of someone who has held this position;

*'As soon as she had taken possession of her estate of Maintenon, she erected a school there for female children...all were poor and friendless.- Madame de Maintenon was desirous that the peasants on her lands should partake of the benefits of this establishments. She composed a body of their daughters, which she called the daughters of charity, or the blue girls.'*<sup>84</sup>

Reeve goes on to describe how Madame de Maintenon established her feminine convent, how she contributed financially to its maintenance and how she, like so many other examples of female utopia within literature, endeavoured to establish an educational resource that was beneficial to society and enabled those less fortunate to better themselves. Reeve goes on to cite examples of how Madame de Maintenon's educational framework has been replicated throughout Europe, as it was 'the most perfect institution of its kind.'<sup>85</sup> Reeve's *Plans on Education* is a perfect encapsulation of the *feminine republic of letters*; it is written in the form of one woman writing to another, it is proposing as an ideal plan to educate young women, a utopian society, and finally, it is looking back at the examples from which it can take guidance. Reeve not only acknowledges the need to look back within the feminine heritage in order to determine the best example of a female seminary for education, but furthermore the example she chooses is that of a famous and honourable Frenchwoman.

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<sup>83</sup> Reeve, C., *Plans of education: with remarks on the systems of other writers, in a series of letters between Mrs. Darnford and her friends*, (London: T. Hookham and J. Carpenter, 1792), pp.40-41.

<sup>84</sup> Reeve, C., *Plans of education: with remarks on the systems of other writers, in a series of letters between Mrs. Darnford and her friends*, (London: T. Hookham and J. Carpenter, 1792), pp.198-200.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.212.

Referencing Rousseau directly or indirectly, had severe political ramifications in 1790s Britain, for although Rousseau had produced the impetus to the French Revolution, he had nevertheless become a reviled, potentially subverting influence in Britain. As Adriana Craciun outlines, by this period Rousseau had altered in perception, from a 'sentimental seducer to dangerous republican philosopher.'<sup>86</sup> The revolutionary women of the period were therefore judged with equal distaste. For these women, Rousseau became not only an ally, for he was, like them, becoming a figure of philosophical and political exile but Rousseau also became a vehicle through which their political assertions could be incorporated into a contemporary debate. Usurping and reforming the foundations of Rousseau became an enhanced, and more immediate political statement.

Helen Maria Williams epitomises the consequence of exile that too close an engagement with Rousseau and the Revolution incurred. Williams had created a salon in London as well as a salon in Paris and directly associated with the political dissenters of the revolution, as well as wholeheartedly supporting the principles behind it. Williams had focused particularly on poetry, and later letter writing, after moving to Paris, and indeed many contemporary critics feared that the inherent feminine relation to these literary forms would be potentially indoctrinating for British women. Her novel *Julia*, however, broadened her audience as an addition to the Rousseauvian critical canon and furthermore, her 'experimentation with fiction was geared at young female readers'<sup>87</sup> through its avoidance of explicit political content. Williams disguises political reference through metaphor, such as by using a poem passionately describing the fall of the Bastille, within a broader and more recognisable literary structure; *virtue-in-distress*.<sup>88</sup> It is within this mechanism that Williams subverts Rousseau's *Heloise*; as opposed to two men, St Preux and Wolmar, vying for the affections of Julie, we see two women struggling over their affections for Frederick. Frederick is married to Julia's cousin Charlotte, despite his love for Julia, and although she can reciprocate, Julia constantly rebuffs his attempts and places her virtue and her friendship with Charlotte at

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<sup>86</sup> Craciun, A., *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the world*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.29.

<sup>87</sup> Hilger, S.M., *Women write back: Strategies of Response and the Dynamics of European Literary Culture, 1790-1805*, (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2009), p.45.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

the moral forefront of the novel. Julia 'represents the moral centre of the novel'<sup>89</sup> and the significance placed on female friendship to conceal the revolutionary message within the novel shows the hybridism of William's intentions.

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote most prolifically on Rousseau and in a letter written in 1794 she professed to being 'half in love with him,'<sup>90</sup> aptly summarising the ambivalent relationship between Rousseau and the revolutionary women of the 1790s. Wollstonecraft created both fictional and analytical texts into the Rousseauvian canon and contributed the most persistent rebuttal and reclamation of his theories. *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*, written in 1798 was one of only two fictional pieces written by Wollstonecraft amidst earlier political tracts within the revolutionary debate. Wollstonecraft uses metatextuality to critique Rousseau's *Héloïse*; in using his novel as the main communicative tool between the characters, and as the catalyst towards the mental debilitation of the main character Maria, the corrupting influence of the novel is subsequently thrown into focus. Both Maria and Jemima have been prevented from fulfilling what Rousseau deemed their inherent maternal obligations as a result of their mistreatment at the hands of men, a critical twist on Rousseau's thesis; although Jemima finally fulfils her maternal instincts through her covert protection of Maria, introducing her to *Héloïse* proves to be most misguiding. Maria becomes delusional, personifying St. Preux in the form of her fellow inmate Henry Darnford:

'She flew to Rousseau as her only refuge from him, who might prove a friend...still, the personification of Saint Preux, or of an ideal lover far superior, was after this imperfect model, of which only a glance had been caught.'<sup>91</sup>

Wollstonecraft counteracts this potent depiction of female subordination and weakness in her most famous work, *A Vindication of the rights of woman*, the prequel to her novel, in which an entire chapter is dedicated to a point-by-point rebuttal of Rousseau's *Emile*. This, along with Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* is one of the first political tracts of the late eighteenth century which enters into the Rousseauvian debate in an attempt to forward the female plight for educational rights. Wollstonecraft claims that Rousseau's depiction of women is self-indulgent, a backward

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<sup>89</sup> Hilger, S.M., *Women write back: Strategies of Response and the Dynamics of European Literary Culture, 1790-1805*, (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2009), p.45.

<sup>90</sup> Trouille, M.S., *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.228

<sup>91</sup> Wollstonecraft, M., *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman*, (Gloucester, England: The Echo Library, 2006), p.14.

attempt to justify the superior position men have unjustly usurped. Wollstonecraft, like de Beauvoir, depicts women's smothered intellectual ability as trapped within a gilt cage.<sup>92</sup> Macaulay had asserted five years previously that if women were to escape this prison it would be beneficial to society as a whole. She refutes the notion that women were created only to complement men and proposes instead that 'there is but one rule of right for the conduct of all rational beings.'<sup>93</sup> The *feminine republic of letters* was finally asserting its political and educational rights within a broader vision of general social progression, aiming to instil a sense of reason, and a level of education, that would no longer discriminate between genders.

Madame de Staël acted as a defender of Rousseau's heartless critique of women, in a manner resembling an almost delusional adoration of his genius and thus, the narrowing social and emotional limitations that may bring. In *Lettres Sur Rousseau*, Staël asserted, 'I believe that his imagination was his primary faculty, even to the point that it absorbed all his other faculties. Instead of living, he dreamed.'<sup>94</sup> Those women who strived to lead the Rousseauvian life were often betrayed by their own intelligence and inherent passion for intellectual betterment. They longed for the domestic bliss and the nostalgic romanticism he depicted, however as Mary Siedman Trouille aptly stated of both Staël and Wollstonecraft, 'they longed for a domestic felicity and security that seemed incompatible with their independent temperaments and with their political and literary activities.'<sup>95</sup> In 1789, following the English translation of Staël's *Lettres*, Wollstonecraft launched an attack in the *Analytical Review*. In this article she critiques Staël's naïvety and over-enthusiasm, which she claimed clouded her clarity and logic.

For Wollstonecraft, the repercussions of Staël's work and indeed her almost embarrassing infatuation with Rousseau was not only a disservice to the more intricate qualities of Rousseau's work, but more importantly, it was detrimental to her sex. Wollstonecraft felt it necessary to critique Staël in such a cut-throat fashion as to assert

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<sup>92</sup> Wollstonecraft, M., *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp.58-59.

<sup>93</sup> Macaulay, C., *Letters on Education*, (New York: Garland, 1974), p.201.

<sup>94</sup> De Staël, G., *Lettres Sur Rousseau*, in M.S., Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.199.

<sup>95</sup> Trouille, M.S., *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.193.

a more intellectually stable and socially progressive presentation of women, in spite of their similar lifestyles and feelings towards Rousseau, she felt indebted to present a healthier alternative. In *Vindication* however, Wollstonecraft fails to mention Stäel's more critical reviews of Rousseau's theories, and stifles her own adoration of him. As Mary Seidman Trouille states, she 'ignored her own admiration for *Julie* and for Rousseau's ideals of sensibility and domesticity,'<sup>96</sup> within the production of *Vindication*, and furthermore, in subsequent editions of Stäel's *Lettres*, it can be noticed that her judgements on Rousseau and the broader woman question fall more closely in line with Wollstonecraftian theory. Wollstonecraft conceals her innate admiration of Rousseau's romanticism in order to present her dialogue with Stäel as formal and impersonal to the masculine audience. The work of Stäel and Wollstonecraft should be considered collaborative; these two great women were using a Rousseauvian platform in order to not only critique one another's work, but to provoke improvements, re-editing and even ideological enlightenment.

Some revolutionary women adored Rousseau and attempted to emulate his doctrines within every detail of their lifestyle, absorbed in his literature and consumed by his guidance, yet it was the very lifestyle they lived that contradicted entirely the woman Rousseau intended to create. For these women, Rousseau was subconsciously usurped to justify a life he detested. The most powerful example of this Rousseauvian *femme de sentiment* was Madame Roland. Wife to a prominent minister within the French Assembly, Madame Roland spliced a strong intellectual capacity and a typically Rousseauvian distaste for female frivolity with an intense devotion to her husband and her obligations within the domestic sphere. From a young age she had been well educated by her mother and was exposed to the most prominent philosophical treatises of the period, however it was Rousseau who had the profoundest influence; 'it seemed to me that I had found my true substance, that Rousseau became the interpreter of feelings and ideas I had had before him, but that he alone could explain to my satisfaction.'<sup>97</sup> It was Rousseau's amplification of the domestic duties of women that resonated with Roland, indeed she seemed privileged to follow his gendered blueprint

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<sup>96</sup> Trouille, M.S., *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.235.

<sup>97</sup> Desan, S., 'Women's experience of the French Revolution: An Historical Overview,' in C.Montford-Howard (ed.), *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1995), p.82.

and considered it her right to aspire to domestic happiness. Nevertheless, in parallel to her academic inclinations, Madame Roland would go on to boost her husband's political career through hosting meetings of business and politics at her Parisian home. Indeed according to Madame Roland, these social events provided a 'perfect inter-community of knowledge and opinions,'<sup>98</sup> firmly evidencing the broader possibilities of female intellectual assimilation. In fact Madame Roland, in a typically Rousseauvian fashion, detested the frivolous nature of female salon culture, in a tone which emphasises her wholehearted belief that a woman should remain in the domestic sphere.

While furthering both her husband's career and reputation, Madame Roland was paradoxically content in hiding in the shadows of the private sphere, and found satisfaction in believing that she was fulfilling her domestic duties. Although on many occasions Madame Roland wrote and spoke in a way that betrayed her intellectualism, seeming privileged and fortunate to be granted opportunity for domestic fulfilment, she often failed to suppress her intrinsic intellectualism which was incapable of remaining exclusively domesticated; 'Household cares I have never neglected; but I cannot comprehend how a woman of method and activity can have her attention engrossed by them.'<sup>99</sup> Women like Madame Roland were rare; while striving to remain secluded in domestication, she nevertheless embodied the figure of the 1790s intellectual woman, in her ardent support for the Revolution and in her uncontrollable betrayal of Rousseau, she provides an example of the most potent product of the *feminine republic of letters*.

The various examples of female literary community that this dissertation has thus far examined constitute concrete but admittedly sporadic evidence of a growing *feminine republic of letters*. There was, however, one woman who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, looked back retrospectively over the achievements of her sex: Mary Hays. She recognised that these achievements formed part of a discernable history of illustrious women, and her commitment to documenting this history can be seen as evidence in itself that not only were women participating in a *feminine republic of letters*, but that they were also beginning to see themselves as citizens of this republic, that they themselves were creating.

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<sup>98</sup> Child, L.M.F., *Memoirs of Madame de Staël and of Madame Roland*, (London: Francis and Company, 1854), p.197.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.200.

### Chapter Three – When we dead are woken: Mary Hays’s Female Biography

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Mary Hays wrote *Female Biography, or, memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women, of all ages and countries*. Hays amalgamated 288 women within a six-volume masterpiece, and her preface states as her primary incentive, to instruct and inspire ‘the rising generation, who have not grown old in folly, whose heart has not yet been seared by fashion, and whose minds prejudice has not yet been warped.’<sup>100</sup> While four hundred years previously, Christine de Pizan had lamented over the contradictions between her own experience and those experiences of women she knew and encountered, and those views promoted by men elevating the natural vice of women. Christine de Pizan portrayed a sense of isolation and solitude as if she were distinct from the sex into which she was born. By 1802 Mary Hays was able to exhibit the richness of women’s achievements and accomplishments in history, and she explicitly outlines her intention to educate and involve a future generation of women within this sense of a collectivised feminine identity. It is clear that in contrast to De Pizan, Hays writes from the perspective of one whose vantage point is thoroughly embedded within a tradition of women’s writing, collective conscience, and sense of purpose. Her work does not, therefore, conform to the conventions of a defence, writing in contrast, and response, to the male perception, but establishes a new tradition that would prove to be more inspiring for future generations: the celebration of women, for women.

By analysing the *Female Biography*, Hays’s language, her criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of her subjects, and the way in which she describes them, it can be shown that Hays’s personal achievement outweighed her stated intent. In this way the *Female Biography* emerges as the most significant evidence for the *feminine republic of letters*, for not only did Hays actively concretise and display a women’s history within which future generations could claim asylum, but in the very act of her doing so she implicitly identifies herself as being part of collective feminine agenda.

The *Female Biography* stands within an established genre that has at the core of its purpose the documentation of illustrious feminine achievement. Giovanni Boccaccio

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<sup>100</sup> Hays, M., *Female Biography or memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women of all ages and countries, alphabetically arranged, first edition*, (London: White Friars, 1803), Vol. 1, p.2.

is considered the first to have deemed it a worthy endeavour and others such as Christine de Pizan, Madeleine de Scudéry and George Ballard have followed, to name the most prominent examples. However, when considering the place of Mary Hays's *Female Biography* within the historiography of feminine recollection, it is important first to take into account two considerations; firstly, a clear backbone of illustrious women can be identified throughout the scope of female biographies, deriving from the antiquity through to the eighteenth century, and thus establishing a continuum of acknowledgement regardless of contemporary authorial influences. Women such as *Sappho, Dido, Joan of Arc, Queens Elizabeth and Christine, Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips* and *Mary Astell* are recurrent names throughout the various biographies, and although themes can be identified within the selection of illustrious women, as it will be discussed, the combination of classical women alongside women of the modern centuries highlights the evolution of what it meant to be *illustrious*. While more modern historians may be able to select and promote the achievements of certain women from relative obscurity, either from acquaintance, living memory or the publication of new primary sources, certain women will continue to be selected because the availability of history has not changed; in other words, many biographers can often use as evidence their most recent female biography as well as the same historical sources. This leads us to our second consideration; while the availability of historical sources, particularly with regards to those women from the antiquity, may remain limited for each production of a female biography, the motives of the respective historians and biographers has continually evolved, and so therefore, has their reasoning for including them. In many ways it is the rationale behind each production of a female biography that can be more explicit in detailing the progress of women in history.

Mary Hays presents the first female biography that has been written for women but external to any pre-existing gendered debates, such as the *querelles des femmes*. Although some historians may have since placed Hays's *Female Biography* within this tradition, transforming it into a publication of female *defence*, Hays's clear intention from the preface onwards is simply to inspire through *celebration*. Hays's preface states;

*'I have at heart the happiness of my sex, and their advancement in the grand scale of rational and social existence. I perceive, with mingled concern and indignation, the follies and vices by which they suffer themselves to be degraded... To excite a worthier emulation, the following memorial of those women, whose endowments, or whose*

*conduct, have reflected lustre upon the sex, is presented more especially to the rising generation, who have not grown old in folly, whose hearts have not yet been seared by fashion, and whose minds prejudice has not yet warped...*<sup>101</sup>

Hays makes subtle references to the theories and themes encircling the debate between the sexes; she asserts their natural inclination to read, but to read beyond the frivolous, unsubstantial ‘skeleton’ subjects that they would undoubtedly deem ‘dry’ and ‘uninteresting.’ The nature/nurture binary is eluded upon when Hays references the ‘follies and vices’ of society which have inevitably obstructed the natural potential of women, and hence why Hays intends to provide the younger generations with her biography, while they are *un-seared* and *unprejudiced* and more inclined to find their identity within their gendered history. By providing a record of history’s illustrious women within six volumes, Hays is essentially providing a safe space, a forum; it is an example of the personal levels of achievement women can attain, as well a personal substance and inheritance from which new generations can anchor themselves within a modern society.

When compared to George Ballard’s *Memoirs of illustrious Women*, one of Hays’s regularly cited historical sources, her desire to collectivise women as part of a history that was separate and gender-specific becomes more apparent and convincing. In Ballard’s preface he states his surprise,

*‘that very many ingenious women of this nation, who were really possess’d of a great share of learning, and have, no doubt, in their time been famous for it, are not only unknown to the publick in general, but have been passed by in silence by our greatest biographers.’*<sup>102</sup>

Although Ballard intends to memorialise illustrious women within his biography, he aims to do so not with the intention to inspire, and specifically attract a female audience, but because it presents a gap in historical documentation. His preface is driven by awareness that a potential publication promoting illustrious women of the past would prove more significant for his career and his reputation within the world of biography. What is perhaps more telling is Ballard’s index; 603 names are referenced within the index, however only 62 *illustrious women* are given a biography. Approximately 55

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<sup>101</sup> Hays, M., *Female Biography or memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women of all ages and countries, alphabetically arranged, first edition*, (London: White Friars, 1803), Vol. 1, p.1.

<sup>102</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.vi.

other women are briefly mentioned throughout and are therefore signposted within the index, leaving in the region of 486 men referenced and cited in the index. Ballard is acknowledging these women within a patriarchal context and considering them illustrious because they have shown qualities that either exemplify female conduct, such as being kind, virtuous and pious, or qualities that are beyond what women would be expected to achieve. Ballard's index epitomises the nature and society against which Mary Hays was attempting to create the *Female Biography*; rather than seeing these women as unique examples within a masculine tradition, and therefore 'distinguished within the republic of letters'<sup>103</sup>, Hays celebrates these women as the foundations of a strong, and independent female history, and as illustrious members of a *feminine republic of letters*.

Whilst the scope of this study does not allow for an extensive discussion of all of Mary Hays's subjects, it is worth analysing in detail some of the inclusions and omissions of the *Female Biography*, in order to identify her criteria for membership within the *feminine republic of letters*. One of most intriguing aspects of the *Female Biography*, and a factor that could possibly distort an attempt to clearly define Hays's agenda in creating a female history, is the famous omission of Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft had a strong connection throughout the 1790s in particular, with Wollstonecraft surging ahead with her politicised agenda, and Hays subservient to her confidence and genius, their relationship was clearly established: 'Wollstonecraft, the trailblazer as female mentor, Hays the devout if curious woman as her apprentice.'<sup>104</sup> When Mary Wollstonecraft died in 1796, Mary Hays was the first to publish a response, as a result of the impending memoirs from her widow, William Godwin. Within the memoir Hays is quick to expose the 'defects of those civil institutions,'<sup>105</sup> and 'her exertions to awaken in the mind of her oppressed sex a sense of their degradation,'<sup>106</sup> as fundamental to her Wollstonecraft's existence, and thus giving

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<sup>103</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.v.

<sup>104</sup> Walker, G.L., *Mary Hays, (1759-1843): the growth of a woman's mind*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.64.

<sup>105</sup> Hays, M., 'Deaths in and near London, Mrs Godwin,' in *Monthly Magazine*, (September, 1797), Vol.4, No. 22, p.233.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233.

significance to ‘the history of this singular woman.’<sup>107</sup> Although Hays’s obituary for Wollstonecraft was short, constituting only two paragraphs within the *Monthly Magazine* of 1797, it must nevertheless be considered as what Walker calls the ‘first instalment’<sup>108</sup> of the *Female Biography* because it constituted what was Hays’s first encroachment into providing a voice for someone she considered an illustrious woman in history. Furthermore, by recollecting Wollstonecraft’s life Hays was able to appreciate her value as someone whose intellectualism could inspire a future generation, and whose domestic life and grounded principles represented an attainable standard of living for women.

With hindsight, it is possible to attempt to justify the omission of Wollstonecraft from the *Female Biography* as a result of her reputation at the time of its publication. By 1802 William Godwin had published her memoirs and shed light upon the more personal, and perhaps disreputable details of Wollstonecraft’s life, such as her attempted suicides and her pregnancy out of wedlock. However, according to a review of Mary Hays *Female Biography*, published in the same year as the biography, the omission of Wollstonecraft from Hays’s biography seemed a glaring mistake; ‘not a word of Mrs (Wollstonecraft) Godwin, who, according to the obvious intention of the author, ought to have been admitted as the champion of her sex, and the reviver of the sexual controversy.’<sup>109</sup> The review implies that Wollstonecraft reputation has, at least at the time of publication, not been destroyed, but remained in high esteem. Mary Wollstonecraft was the woman to whom Mary Hays was closest; although Wollstonecraft cannot be seen directly within the pages of the *Female Biography*, she is visible and referenced in a way that could perhaps be considered Hays’s truest memorial to her friend and mentor, through the inclusion Catharine Macaulay and Hester Chapone.

In the preface to the *Female Biography*, Hays states that,

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<sup>107</sup> Hays, M., ‘Deaths in and near London, Mrs Godwin,’ in *Monthly Magazine*, (September, 1797), Vol.4, No. 22, p.233.

<sup>108</sup> Walker, G.L., *Mary Hays, (1759-1843): the growth of a woman’s mind*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.222.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Review of Mary Hays’s *Female Biography*,’ in *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, (April, 1803), Vol. 37, p.417.

*'no character of eminence will, in the following work, I trust, be found omitted, except for those who have come nearer to our own ties; of whom, for reasons unnecessary to be detailed, but few have been brought forward.'*<sup>110</sup>

The aforementioned review questions this decision, questioning why it would be unnecessary, and, on a similar vein to the omission of Wollstonecraft, the rejection of so many women who were constructive within the revolutionary debate of the 1790s cannot help but provoke incredulity. Indeed, few women from the second half of the eighteenth century are included with the biography, however those women that are included, as well as those that are not, prove significant in understanding Hays's visualisation of a female history.

Firstly, including an abundance of women from the late eighteenth century and the revolutionary period of the 1790s would empower a heightened political purpose behind the *Female Biography*; Hays is hoping to inspire a young, untainted generation of women, however at the time of her publication the revolutionary debate in Britain is on-going, as is therefore, the Revolution in France. Risking the integrity of the biography would render its objectives useless. Although the inclusion Charlotte Corday, the assassin of Marat in the French Revolution, would perhaps disprove this theory, it should nevertheless be asserted that unlike her 1790s contemporaries, Corday was no longer living. Secondly, women such as Elizabeth Haywood and Sarah Fielding, who were instrumental within the context discussed in chapter two, most notably their attempts to write female utopian fiction, are referenced by Hays. While the content of their biography is incredibly short, constituting little more than a paragraph for each woman, what is significant is Mary Hays's immediate reference to their literary contribution, naming Fielding's and Haywood's most prominent works and in the case of Elizabeth Haywood, giving minimal attention to her more dramatic works, deemed by Hays to be 'of inferior merit'<sup>111</sup> in a tone which echoes her feminine romanticist roots. What is perhaps more telling with regards to Haywood and Fielding, is that their biography is not sourced; throughout the *Female Biography* Hays never failed to cite even the more obscure sources for certain biographies, and although she may have

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<sup>110</sup> Hays, M., *Female Biography or memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women of all ages and countries, alphabetically arranged, first edition*, (London: White Friars, 1803), Vol. 1, p.2.

<sup>111</sup> 'Eliza Haywood,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.402.

resorted to some other form of historical reference, it is clear that Hays is citing these women and their works from her own memory.

Finally, the absence, or minimal recognition of women from Hays's own period in history, does more to promote the presence and recognition of Catherine Macaulay and Hester Chapone. Hester Chapone is the most recent female within the biography, and the only one to have witnessed the nineteenth century, dying in 1801. By reading Hays's memorial to Chapone it is possible to make two important observations; firstly, Chapone's biography is, like that of Haywood and Fielding, providing without citing the use of sources. Chapone was alive when Hays would have been developing her *Female Biography*; her life would have been well-known to Hays and when attaining information for her inclusion in the biography Hays footnotes a character reference by Anna Barbauld, a fellow female author. Hays is able to not only memorialise the life of an illustrious woman in society in accordance with her objectives for the *Female Biography*, but in the process of doing so Hays is able to display female networking, reminiscent conversation and therefore, collective memory. The second point to make regarding Hester Chapone, is that within her biography Hays references her most famous work, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady*, because it has as its guide the importance of feminine experience and purports a similar motivation to prevent the perversion of young female minds. Hays is displaying an abundant awareness of female literary production, as well as the progressive feminine agendas of her subjects, and Hays's selectivity, and at times uses dismissive language when regarding the more frivolous activities of her women, displays her desire to create a biography that possesses agency.

The most powerful statement Hays makes through her selection of Macaulay and Chapone, and her isolation of these two women as the most recent to be given a biography, comes when considering that Macaulay and Chapone are the only two women to be referenced by Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; *'Mrs Chapone's Letters are written with such good sense and unaffected humility, and contain so many useful observations, that I only mention them to pay the worthy writer this tribute of respect...the very word respect bring Mrs Macaulay to my remembrance.*

*The woman of the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced.*<sup>112</sup>

Wollstonecraft had always revered Catherine Macaulay with a deference that reflects Mary Hays admiration for Wollstonecraft. Bridget Hill has recently written an article which sheds light on some new evidence which shows that for a brief period Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay corresponded. Wollstonecraft sent the letter as an act of admiration towards Macaulay, and the language she uses displays her deference to Macaulay's philosophical clarity;

*'You are the only female writer who I coincide in opinion with respecting the rank our sex ought to endeavour to attain in the world. I respect Mrs Macaulay Graham because she contends for laurels while most of her sex only seek for flowers.'*<sup>113</sup>

Wollstonecraft shows her visualisation of the contribution made by women within the debates on education and increased rights, for she is able to identify those whom she agrees with and with whose opinions she can sympathise. Macaulay responded within the same month, and thanks Wollstonecraft for the inclusion of *Vindication of the rights of men* with the letter. Macaulay shows a pride in knowing that such a work has been written by a woman and that the doctrines she has been writing are justified by the work Wollstonecraft has produced; 'this publication which I have so greatly admired from its pathos & sentiment should have been written by a woman and thus to see my opinion of the powers and talents of the sex in your pen so early verified.'<sup>114</sup> Macaulay ends her letter by stating that she will have included with it the observations she documented regarding Burke's publication, and although the correspondence between Macaulay and Wollstonecraft was brief, it nevertheless shows the reverence women writers can have for one another, and how their work is received by their own sex. Wollstonecraft sent an edition of her most recent political publication, and Macaulay reciprocated in the same way; even if these women were never to meet, they established a primitive literary connection and displayed the desire to share their work, not for approval but as a simple

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<sup>112</sup> Wollstonecraft, M., *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.131.

<sup>113</sup> Hill, B., 'The links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay: new evidence,' in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1995), p.177.

<sup>114</sup> Hill, B., 'The links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay: new evidence,' in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1995), p.178.

act of communication with a fellow female writer. This brief correspondence can therefore be seen as the purest example of the *feminine republic of letters* in action.

Mary Hays had clear motivations when dealing with her exclusion of Mary Wollstonecraft and in many ways she was given a tribute through the inclusion of Macaulay and Chapone. Nevertheless, by analysing some of Hays's other inclusions, it is clear that her motivations were much broader, and her visualisation of *feminine republic of letters* extends to women from a multitude of social origins and backgrounds. By analysing Hays in comparison to one of her most commonly cited sources, George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, Hays incentives become clearer. Ballard restricts his selections to women of Great Britain, claiming that not only have biographies of foreign women been done before, but 'England has produced more women famous for literary accomplishments.'<sup>115</sup> Hays includes more women in her *Female Biography* than in any other of the resources she cites; by including 288 women, from a variety of nations, historical periods and social backgrounds, Hays is creating a broader picture and a clear ability to visualise a broad range of women, without the restrictions of national pride, and the characteristics she continuously highlights in her women depicts an attempt by Hays to establish a universal picture of women.

As well as her range and choice of subjects, Hays's biography differs noticeably from Ballard's in various other ways. Ballard writes from a purely phallogentric perspective, acknowledging women only as they figure as part of a dominantly masculine culture and society, rather than realising the feminine tradition that they constitute in their own right. Hays clearly writes her *Female Biography* for women, not only for the reason outlined in her preface, that being to inspire and create a feminine identity for future generations, but Hays also writes with a view for any woman to read her biography, in other words, she anticipates a broader female audience. Furthermore, Hays often includes more personal information for the women in her biography, often including excerpts from the women's own journals, diaries and writing, which creates the impression that Hays is writing to defend the women of the past and to memorialise their lives in a way which provides a more genuine and personalised account.

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<sup>115</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.vi.

The most effective way of highlighting the contrasting incentives and gendered perspectives of Hays and Ballard, is by analysing and comparing the biographies they provide for the same illustrious women, beginning with Ann Clifford, Countess of Pembroke. In Ballard's opening paragraph he makes brief reference to Ann's noble descendants and refers to her as the 'sole heir to George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland.'<sup>116</sup> In contrast, Hays provides a more personalised account by giving detail of George Clifford, who had 'distinguished himself by naval expeditions, on which he had expended a great part of his patrimony,'<sup>117</sup> and who had left a daughter of only ten years old when he died. Later on in the biography Hays includes an exert whereby Clifford is assessing her life and her mental and physical constitution, thus establishing not only a better mental image of the person of whom we know so much, but also an image of a woman who has been grounded by the inheritance of her mother and father in a way which perhaps, makes her more relatable, as oppose to unobtainably illustrious; 'I resemble equally both father and mother: the colour of my eyes was black like my father's, the form and aspect of them quick and lively like my mother's.'<sup>118</sup>

What is striking is how frequently Ballard justifies the illustriousness of Clifford through reference to her religious conviction; 'she was very exemplary in observing religious duties both in publick and private, being a constant frequenter of divine service, as well as attendant at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.'<sup>119</sup> Ballard emphasises Clifford's charity and forgiveness; 'her charity was very extensive, in relieving the indigent and the oppressed, and forgiving her most implacable enemies.'<sup>120</sup> Not only does Ballard fail to thoroughly explain why Clifford should have enemies, but he also stresses the most traditionally feminine qualities with religious connotations in

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<sup>116</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.301.

<sup>117</sup> 'Ann Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.382.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.395.

<sup>119</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.310.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.311.

order to depict illustriousness through piety and kindness. Ballard anchors any examples of exceptionality within the feminine space of the domestic;

*'she had early gained a knowledge, as of the best of things, so an ability to discourse in all commendable arts and sciences, as well as in those things which belong to persons of her birth and sex to know. For she could discourse with Virtuouso's, Travellers, Schollars, Merchants, Divines, Statesmen, and with good housewives in any kind...although she was skilful in housewifery, and in such things in which women are conversant; yet her penetrating wit soared up to pry in the highest Mysteries, looking at the highest example of female wisdom.'*<sup>121</sup>

Any example of going beyond what was expected from a woman's capability was continuously prefaced by a statement confirming that Clifford would nevertheless make a good wife and mother. Ballard also bolsters the sentiment within the biography by using quotes and recollections from the men who knew Clifford, namely Dr. Samuel Daniel, her tutor, and Bishop Rainbow, who knew her well, without providing the bulk of the memorial from his own judgement and personal reverence.

Hays's biography of Clifford provides us with a more honest account of her life, by not only supplying us with more detail, but by providing us with the alternative side of Clifford's character, that of a woman who was independent, strong-willed and deeply political. Clifford inherited five estates following the death of her father and later her uncle, and she began to repair and restore them since they had fallen into disrepair throughout the Civil War. Of this development Hays writes;

*'Oliver Cromwell was, about this period, at the head of the state: his usurpations and his hypocrisy had inspired the countess with an aversion to his character, which she too little pains to conceal. Her friends, aware of the jealous temper of the protector, advised her to be less lavish in building, hinting, that there was cause to fear that her castles would be no sooner rebuilt, than order would be sent to demolish them. "Let him," said she with spirit, "destroy them if he will; he shall surely find, that as often as he destroys I will rebuild them, while he leaves me a shilling in my pocket.'*<sup>122</sup>

Hays provides us with extra detail, even to the degree that some might find unnecessary, however on close inspection this detail awakens us to the more intrinsic qualities of Clifford's character; her bravery, her stubbornness, her political awareness and

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<sup>121</sup> Ballard, G., *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by W. Jackson, 1752), p.308.

<sup>122</sup> 'Ann Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.385-386.

conviction, as well as her commitment to maintaining her heritage and providing for her community. Ballard fails to quote Anne Clifford at any point throughout his memoir, whereas Hays has as the backbone to her memoir, direct quotes and anecdotal references, in a way that emphasises Hays's desire to provide a voice for these illustrious women of the past.

When Clifford is informed that one of her estates, Appleby, would be given a candidate by the state to represent the borough, Clifford responded in what Hays deemed a 'spirited and laconic reply,'<sup>123</sup> by saying;

*'I have been bullied by an usurper, I have been neglected by a court, but I will not be dictated to by a subject. Your man sha'n't stand.'*<sup>124</sup>

Hays deemed this response by Clifford as 'another instance of her independent spirit,'<sup>125</sup> and the statement depicts an assertiveness and conviction which would have made Ann Clifford a formidable presence, an impression of her character which was not to be seen within Ballard's biography. Hays goes on to say that 'to vain and frivolous gratifications she allowed nothing,'<sup>126</sup> each characteristic of Clifford emphasised by Hays effectively outlines the characteristics that Hays admires and aims to instil within the future generations of young women. Although Clifford was born into wealth and maintained a fortunate financial stability throughout her life, Hays was keen to emphasise how Clifford used her wealth within her community. Clifford built estates and regularly interacted, dined and conversed with her residents, she was;

*'the patroness of the distressed her ear and her heart were open to their complaints; her expanded mind and liberal fortune were in unison none implored relief from her in vain. To occasional acts of beneficence she added permanent endowments, among which she founded two hospitals.'*<sup>127</sup>

While Ballard made constant reference to Clifford's fulfilment of her domestic duties and excellence in housewifery, Hays persuasively describes how Clifford's inherently feminine kindness and empathy could be productive at a community level, without expending these qualities on frivolous obsessions.

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<sup>123</sup> 'Ann Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.386.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.386-387.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.386.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p.390.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.387.

Hays includes large extracts from Clifford's own journal, and from this vast source she includes Clifford's accounts of her two husbands, Richard Earl of Dorset and Phillip Earl of Pembroke. Although neither of her accounts portray a negative judgement or intense scrutiny, claiming both were well beloved, their inclusion is nevertheless intriguing. Hays is allowing Clifford to document her history; it is possible that these recollections are the only ones available to Hays, or the only ones existent, yet by including them in her volume, Hays is enshrining Clifford's own recollections of her experiences. This is further confirmed by Clifford's continuing resort to concretise her past; Clifford created monuments to her parents and to her tutor Dr. Samuel Daniel; she studied her ancestry and she rebuilt her family estates to solidify her foundations within society.

Hays goes on to provide her own verdict on the second of Clifford's husbands;

*Of the inducements of lady Ann for forming a connection with a man so worthless, there is no account: it is certain that, for nearly twenty years, her life was by his conduct considerably embittered and that by his dissolute manners she was at length compelled to separate herself from his; till, in January, 1649, death relieved her from the fetters which had become nearly intolerable.*<sup>128</sup>

This may have been Hays's attempt to critique the institution of marriage and its debilitating effects on a woman's freedom, if the marriage was not one of equality and friendship.

When reading Hays's biography of Ann Clifford, it becomes more evident that Hays constructs each sentence with meticulous care and concern for the impression it creates and the message it confers. Hays uses positive language, describing Clifford as liberal, independent, and brave in overcoming her obstacles; 'the spirit and firmness with which she defended her rights, doubtless preserved her.'<sup>129</sup> Hays is trying to place typically feminine qualities, such as kindness and domestic loyalty, alongside traits that define Clifford as a strong woman, and by documenting Clifford's own written recollections Hays is urging the importance of documenting experience. This insistence on the preservation of feminine narratives from a variety of backgrounds is intrinsic to the maintenance of the wider *feminine republic of letters*, as Hays places women's

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<sup>128</sup> 'Ann Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.384.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.390.

experience at the centre of her work but does not privilege one set of experiences over any other, as Ballard invariably does.

It becomes clear that Hays's criteria of female value transcends the boundaries of class and background, but it also transcends the boundary between historical reality and fiction. This is evident in her inclusion of Harriet Eusebia Harcourt, an entirely fictionalised character. Harriet is a fictional character within Thomas Amory's novel *The Life and Opinions of John Bunclie, Esquire*, from 1756, and by analysing why Hays has included her within her *Female Biography*, it can be determined what values and qualities she acknowledges as illustrious. Hays firstly describes Harcourt's exemplary personal qualities, stating that;

*'she possessed, with uncommon powers of application, a superior capacity, while from the care and tenderness of her father her mind received a high degree of cultivation and promise. Her imagination was lively and fertile, her sentiments elevated, her heart pure, and her temper kind and benevolent.'*<sup>130</sup>

Indeed benevolence is the most common characteristic highlighted as illustrious by Mary Hays, appearing in countless sections of her biography, and perhaps alluding to her desire to prevent the frivolous and to instil a sense of charitable, community level contribution and interaction amongst women. Hays goes on to depict how Harcourt went abroad with her father, and remained there nine years after his death, returning to England 'accompanied by several ladies, with whom she had formed an acquaintance in her travels.'<sup>131</sup> This cosmopolitan lifestyle of Harcourt, the desire not only to travel but to associate with like-minded women in other countries, creates an image of a modern woman who strives to be amongst other intellectual women. On her return to England Harcourt constructed a cloister of women in an estate on an island near Scotland, 'an agreeable society of her own sex.'<sup>132</sup> Harcourt essentially established a female utopia, whereby each woman contributed financially to the upkeep of the estate, and lived in a system of equality, devoting their time to the exercise of religion, 'elegant and rational

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<sup>130</sup> 'Harriet Eusebia Harcourt,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.387.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.388.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p.388.

amusements...the study of science, the belles-lettres, ornamental works, and conversation.<sup>133</sup>

On Harcourt's death in 1745, instructions were left to maintain the estate for its original purpose and the financial requirements were bequeathed by Harcourt. Hays has included a fictional woman who has not only amalgamated women within a physical retreat that is self-maintaining, but she has driven the estate along intellectual designs and the attainment of academic and artistic betterment. Furthermore, Harcourt visualised her agenda to such a degree that she documented her thoughts and experiences in an attempt to continue the development of the estate after her death. Hays recognised that an historical tradition of women is also inscribed in, and can be reclaimed from, fictional as well as factual spaces. Hays therefore accorded value to any place in which women saw their positive qualities and potential represented and reflected. This epitomises the sentiment of the *feminine republic of letters*, of which Hays was a vital and exemplary participant.

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<sup>133</sup> 'Harriet Eusebia Harcourt,' in *Female Biography Project*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. 2012. Private website. Date Accessed, 23/08/12. <http://femalebiographyproject.pbworks.com/w/page/25894214/The%20Female%20Biography%20Project%20-%20Public%20Page>. Facsimile version, p.388.

## Conclusion

From as early as the publication of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in 1403, through to the end of the long eighteenth century, women have participated in diverse acts of communication, which are based around the liberating potential of the pen. Although the *querelle des femmes* has remained an established, albeit limited means of female literary participation, that arguably began centuries before de Pizan, it nevertheless became the origin of a much broader engagement with literary forms and ideas. The *querelle des femmes* was an acknowledged form of communication based on a linear pattern of reaction and response through the written word. While many women have contributed to this tradition of misogynistic critique and female defence, it has nevertheless been driven by a masculine priority. Although women have continuously retaliated, however eloquently, they have nevertheless presented a fragmented armour against the profusion of patriarchal beliefs. If one were to consider women's writing and women's homosocial interaction external to the *querelle des femmes*, then a noticeable tradition of literary sisterhood could be seen to emerge.

This dissertation has analysed various feminine pockets of activity, which I have argued are significant contributions to the wider *feminine republic of letters*. In the salon culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, women not only sought to interact with intellectual men, but aimed to cultivate an alternative intellectual network with their own sex. While this tradition started in France, it was transported to Britain by either direct assimilation and communication, or by the more subtle act of writing, in the manner of Cavendish and Philips, literary female utopia. The various ways in which women exchanged and circulated literature and ideas, and the homosocial bonds they cultivated, can be seen to have been instrumental in building and maintaining an international feminine literary community.

While the salon culture was undoubtedly instrumental in establishing direct female friendship and communication, it was the beginnings of a tradition that endured into the eighteenth century, and which manifested itself in a proliferation of utopian fiction external the institutional confines of the salon. By adopting the form of utopian fiction women were afforded a means of responding politically to the revolutionary climate of the time. In actively engaging with revived Rousseauvian philosophies, and

the masculinist attitude they exhibited, women were able to subvert the ideological gaps within this philosophy and inscribe a reactionary presence in the contemporary literary and political environment.

It is pertinent to end with Mary Hays's *Female Biography*, because not only does it participate in the growing trend of women's writing by the end of the eighteenth century, but it also recognises the significance of its own contribution to a longer tradition of a feminine historical continuum. While Hays is contributing to a separate tradition of creating a biography of illustrious women of the past, she recognises the necessity of universal traits like friendship, communication and most importantly, experience, to the lives of her biographical subjects and the future generations she hopes to inspire. By creating a female biography, Hays is documenting her visualisation of a *feminine republic of letters*, and by choosing biography itself, and the act of remembering as her vehicle for doing so, Hays is introspectively placing herself within this tradition.

This dissertation has attempted to highlight the existence and importance of a *feminine republic of letters* in history, and more specifically as part of a women's history, however it has not thus far acknowledged whether a purely feminist perspective is relevant and justified – was Mary Hays a feminist?

To describe Mary Hays as a feminist would be to impose an anachronistic framework on her literary contributions and personal convictions. Nevertheless, her act of reclaiming and giving visibility to women of the past echoes the demands and practices established by second-wave feminist scholars from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Hays's endeavour to create a uniquely feminine identity separate from the established masculine traditions, has long been part of an on-going commitment to recognise and document the importance of women's collective and individual experience, as Elaine Showalter summaries;

*'the programme of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women*

*between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture.*<sup>134</sup>

Mary Hays mirrored this need to emphasise a woman's experience as distinct from any pre-existing male tradition, and recognised the importance of redressing women's neglected presence within the dominant literary and historical culture, as a way by which a collective female identity can be forged. This concern is evident in Hays's biography; while she often uses masculine sources such as George Ballard's biography, she utilises what is available to her and in doing so critiques the masculinist agenda of these sources. Hays is aware that her historical references are submerged within a male tradition, and if she is to inspire a future generation of women, and instil within them a sense of female identity, she must first provide for them, an interpretation of history that is entirely through a feminine lens.

Hays is starting to critique and reconceptualise the traditional view of history, a task which Gerda Lerner views as the primary tool for beginning to redress the gender imbalance in history;

*'the individual concerned with the search for what is missing from traditional history usually conceptualizes the problem that way, as a first step: The story of women "missing" from history is discovered, resurrected, and newly interpreted. Women are made to fit into the empty spaces of traditional history.'*<sup>135</sup>

Mary Hays showed a clear awareness of the concerns that were to later consume the second wave feminist agenda of historical revision. Hays was able to visualise the empty spaces identified by Lerner, and was able to re-inscribe women's identity and historical presence within them. For this reason, Mary Hays must be considered as an equal feminist presence alongside her contemporaries such as Mary Wollstonecraft, and her *Female Biography* the product of a feminist agenda.

The refusal to remain silent within historical space designated as empty by the dominant culture is the driving force behind a visible, vocal and vital *feminine republic of letters*.

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<sup>134</sup> Showalter, E., 'Towards a Feminist Poetics,' in eds. P. Rice and P. Waugh, *Modern Literary Theory*, (London: Arnold, 2001), p.149.

<sup>135</sup> Lerner, G., *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p.xiv.

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Abstract –

La fête des femmes: The feminine republic of letters in the long eighteenth century

This dissertation examines a plethora of women's literary engagements during the long eighteenth century. It relates this literary output to the established and recognised body of works by men and women which have come to be known collectively as the *querelle des femmes*. However, it argues that a distinct trend of women communicating, responding to one another and documenting their experience through a variety of literary forms and homosocial practices can be seen to have developed externally to the narrow confines of the *querelle des femmes*. This literary community is part of a wider trend of women writing for and about their own sex which I term the *feminine republic of letters*. This dissertation takes the Anglo-French communicative bonds between women which evolved from the institution of the salon that originated in the seventeenth century. It goes on to consider how, in the 1790s, women read and wrote in response to a revival of Rousseauvian philosophies and adapted pre-existing forms into new methods through which to discuss women's proscribed position in society and through which to envision a utopian alternative predicated on feminine community. I end with an analysis of Mary Hays's *Female Biography* which exemplifies women's endeavour to found and celebrate a history of their own, through which they can begin to assert themselves as part of a visible community: a *feminine republic of letters*.

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