

The  
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**Sister Artists: The Artist Heroine in British Women's Writing, 1760-1830**

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## II

And truly women have excelled indeed  
In every art to which they set their hand,  
And any who to history pay heed  
Their fame will find diffused in every land.  
If in some ages they do not succeed,  
Their renaissance is not forever banned.  
Envy their merit has perhaps concealed  
Or unawareness left them unrevealed.

ARIOSTO, *ORLANDO FURIOSO* (PART 1: CANTO XX)

**Declaration**

*I, the author, confirm that this thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

## Abstract

This thesis analyses the ways in which women writers of the long eighteenth century respond to one another in their use of artist heroines in their work. Not only does the figure of the woman artist provide a means for women writers to self-reflexively consider their own career choices, but enables them to comment upon the wider position of women in society in terms of class, national identity, and sexuality. In Angelica Kauffman's *Self-portrait Hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794) she visualizes her choice to become an artist by representing it as a struggle between two Muses competing for her attention. This thesis similarly seeks to address such tensions present in literary representations of women artists during the long eighteenth century. Whether the tension is between music and painting, art and craft, or copy versus original, the representation of inner conflict or comparison contributes to debates surrounding the value of women's art and is illustrative of the underlying tensions between vice and virtue, activity and passivity, and what is considered masculine or feminine behaviour. Whilst there has been much comment on the figure of the woman writer in the eighteenth century, the literary representation of the artist in this period has not received due critical attention. Paying particular attention to the artist heroines in the novels of Sarah Scott, Mary Hamilton, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, and Anna Maria Porter, alongside the poetry of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, will show how these writers negotiate the difficulties women faced in securing an independent living through artistic talent, and use art to give women agency when the male gaze prioritizes the alluring appearance of artistic practice over the finished product.

## Acknowledgements

It seems strange that a thesis about sisterly influence and the benefits of community over isolation should be completed during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Whilst the social distancing measures of lockdown undoubtedly made research challenging for all, the academic community proved extremely supportive as friends and colleagues rallied around to offer help. For that reason, there is a long list of people I would like to take the opportunity to thank.

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Chris and Mike Moss, for always believing in me. It would not have been possible for me to complete my PhD without your love and support, and for that I dedicate this thesis to you both.

Hannah Moss,

August 2020

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## Introduction

### Footprints in the Sand: Why Write About Women's Art?

Our native paintresses, as the old-fashioned art critics and compilers of biographical dictionaries quaintly term them, have left but faintly impressed footprints on the sands of time. They do not glitter in the splendour of renown, like their sisters of the pen or of the buskin. It is a difficult task to obtain a sparse list of their original works, or glean any scattered remarks on their most valued copies of great masters. Even the most romantic or admired of these fair dreamers on canvas or ivory have scarce an incident beyond the commonplace in the brief record of their public or private career.

Ellen C. Clayton, *English Female Artists* (1876)<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the career of Maria Anne Angelica Kauffman may serve as an illustration as to how far the power of woman will carry her; and it is satisfactory to observe that if she may not aspire to rank with the giant intellects that have guided mankind, she may through the fine arts achieve success, reputation, and fortune.

*Dublin University Magazine* (October 1873)<sup>2</sup>

This thesis seeks to explore the depiction of the artist heroine in women's writing of the period 1760-1830 in terms of how prevalent ideologies of gender, nation, and class intersect with the aesthetic debates surrounding women's art. In the epigraph taken from *English Female Artists* (1873), Ellen C. Clayton outlines the difficulties she faced in compiling biographical accounts of 'our native paintresses'. Likening the legacy of women artists to faint footprints in the sand highlights the problem of preservation; copies taken from the Old Masters or privately commissioned works of art given to family and friends do not inspire comment or generate the kind of public records which preserve a male artist's reputation for posterity. However, in spite of her protestations, Clayton still managed to fill two volumes of

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen C. Clayton, *English Female Artists*, Vol. 1 of 2 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> J.P., 'Angelica Kauffman, R.A.', *Dublin University Magazine* (October 1873), pp. 477-88 (p. 488).

historical and contemporary examples for her biographical dictionary, the scarcity of incident serving to protect the women artists she surveys from censure. In choosing to pursue an artistic career, a woman risks deviating from societal expectations as her artistic aspirations could easily lead her away from the duties of a wife and mother. The issues Clayton highlights — the focus on nationality; the status of women's work; the tension between original and copy; the difference between public and private production; and the fragility of reputation and legacy — are all significant factors informing the characterization of the woman artist in literature which will be investigated through the course of this thesis.

If a woman is to be successful in any realm beyond the home, then the arts provide a suitable means of achieving 'success, reputation, and fortune.' As stated in the epigraph taken from the *Dublin University Magazine* of October 1873, the career of Angelica Kauffman provides a notable example of how a woman might reconcile her sex with her artistic aspiration. Kauffman's *Self-portrait of the Artist hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794) looks back at the choice she made in setting aside her much lauded musical talent in order to pursue a career as an artist under the tutelage of her father. Kauffman represents this pivotal moment as a struggle between virtue and vice through the visual allusion to the 'Choice of Hercules'. In the story recounted by the sophist Prodicus (c. 400 BCE), Hercules had been visited by the allegorical figures of Virtue and Vice who offered him a choice; he could follow Vice on the path of earthly pleasure or take the more difficult route to fame and glory shown to him by Virtue.<sup>3</sup> This proved a popular subject for art during the eighteenth century with Joshua Reynolds working from the 'Choice of Hercules' model in his portrait *Garrick Between Tragedy and Comedy* (1760-1). Despite the number of works on

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<sup>3</sup> Although attributed to Prodicus, the original version is lost. However, the main substance of the story is recounted in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, 2:1. See Xenophon, *The Memorable Thoughts of Socrates*, ed. by Henry Morley, trans. by Edward Bysshe (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2013), pp. 58-63.

this theme, Frances Borzello identifies Kauffman's as the first all-female grouping.<sup>4</sup> Kauffman takes this well-used, recognizable format to frame her experience as a woman and an artist.



Figure 0.1: Angelica Kauffman, *Self-portrait of the Artist hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794), oil on canvas 147.3 x 215.9 cm, Nostell Priory, NT 960079, image © National Trust Images.

The artist depicts herself in the centre of the canvas, modestly yet fashionably dressed in a white chemise. An allegorical female figure representing music, holding a score, takes Kauffman's hand to lure her down the path of vice, whilst the corresponding figure representing painting points to a temple atop Mount Parnassus, imploring her to take the virtuous path to lasting glory even if it is a more difficult route. Even though it is suggested that music would be the easier, more feminine choice, painting represents the virtuous path in spite of the risk of an artistic career being considered an encroachment on male territory.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), p. 82.

Framing this decision as a choice between vice and virtue, therefore, challenges the negative associations of a woman pursuing a career by positioning the art of painting in a positive light. Art provides a very real possibility for achieving fame in the face of the difficulties which inevitably lie ahead.

Kauffman had made the choice to become an artist rather than a singer when a priest had warned her that the stage would be a dangerous place for a young girl, and that the pursuit of her musical talent would undoubtedly throw her into the path of particularly louche individuals. This episode is prominently featured in the short biography of Kauffman published in the *Dublin University Magazine* in order to provide a positive role model of female modesty and success.<sup>5</sup> Careful to emphasize that she copied from models, and never attended life drawing sessions, the Magazine stresses that ‘Her pencil was faithful to art and to womanhood, and she never depicted voluptuous or indelicate images.’<sup>6</sup> Kauffman still faced criticism for displaying either too much or too little anatomical knowledge, but here, an eighteenth-century figure supplies a role model for the increasing numbers of women artists who were taking up the brush through the course of the nineteenth century.

Existing criticism of the artist heroine focuses on examples from the nineteenth century onwards owing to the surge in publications following in the wake of increased opportunities to train. However, allusion to earlier women artists, whether a real-life figure such as Angelica Kauffman who is fictionalized in Anne Thackeray’s novel *Miss Angel* (1875), or a literary precedent such as Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* (1807), highlights the need to appraise earlier iterations of the artist heroine which have been overlooked. This thesis will, therefore, look back to women’s writing of the eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century to fill this neglected area of scholarship.

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<sup>5</sup> J.P., *Dublin University Magazine*, p. 488.

<sup>6</sup> J.P., *Dublin University Magazine*, p. 488.

When E.F. Ellet published her compendium of *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (1859), *The Saturday Review*'s response was to question the need to discuss women artists apart from their male counterparts: 'There is no reason that we know of why female artists should be treated as a separate class, and we should have thought it more complimentary to the sex to admit them frankly into the general artistic community.'<sup>7</sup> Whilst this is a valid observation, women's exclusion from 'the general artistic community' made texts like Ellet's necessary. Furthermore, women artists are subject to a different experience.

Recognizing that the sub-genre of the *Künstlerinroman*, or female artist novel, requires separate consideration from texts centred on their male counterparts, Evy Varsamopoulou cites Madame de Staël's *Corinne* as the first example to emerge with a metafictional dimension to the text, in that the creation of a fictional account of the development of an artist/writer 'also leads them to make (subjective) statements about the creation of all literature'.<sup>8</sup> As such, most studies take this starting point to look to the representation of the woman artist in nineteenth-century literature, positioning the works of the Brontës, Eliot, and Sand in relation to the increased visibility of the woman artist. This thesis will look back to the literary predecessors which informed this portrait, before turning to look at the early influence of *Corinne* on British writers.

Kauffman's *Self-Portrait* provides an apt starting point from which to view literary figurations of the woman artist owing to the narrative of tension she represents. In depicting herself at a crossroads, Kauffman's painting provides a visual challenge to the linear bildung experience. In *Unbecoming Women* (1993), Susan Fraiman questions the *conventional assumptions* associated with the novel of development by proposing an alternate model for

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<sup>7</sup> Anon, 'Review of *Women Artists* by Mrs. E.F. Ellet', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, Vol. 10: 14 July 1860 (London: Saturday Review Ltd., 1860), pp. 54-56 (p. 54). See E.F. Ellet, *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (London: Bentley, 1859).

<sup>8</sup> Evy Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime*, Studies in European Cultural Transition, Vol. XI (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. xxiii-xxiv.

female experience: ‘I would like to imagine the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as the endless negotiation of a crossroads.’<sup>9</sup> Whilst the trajectory of the *bildung* informs the novels studied by Fraiman, female experience does not completely fit the expectations of the form: ‘a heroine’s progress towards masterful selfhood is by no means assured.’<sup>10</sup> Fraiman quotes Judith Butler’s paraphrasing of Simone de Beauvoir to argue how, for women, linear perfectibility is replaced with a process of constant renegotiation: becoming a woman is ‘an incessant project, a daily act of reconstruction and reinterpretation.’<sup>11</sup> Describing how women are split between competing pathways reinforces the idea that a woman is not simply choosing between different art forms, but constantly negotiating between the competing demands and expectations of her gender, class, and nation. With the *bildung* grounded in the German Enlightenment belief in progress and perfectibility, this literary model of personal development is itself the product of a certain context. Similarly, context is key to the interpretation of the *Künstlerinroman*, as the development of the woman artist raises wider questions about the position of women in society.

An overarching question to be investigated over the course of this thesis is: how do women writers work to reconcile the competing demands and expectations of being a woman and an artist? Susan J. Rosowski’s work on ‘The Novel of Awakening’ (1983) describes a woman’s development in terms of ‘an awakening to limitations.’<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth-century novel, this awakening occurs when the heroine becomes aware of the conflict between her

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. x.

<sup>10</sup> Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, p. x.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault’, in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late Capitalist Societies*, ed. by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), pp. 128–42 (p. 131), quoted in Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, p. x.

<sup>12</sup> Susan J. Rosowski, ‘The Novel of Awakening’, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), pp.49-68 (p. 68).

public and private selves and ‘confronts the disparity between her two lives’, as when Dorothea Brooke’s identity is subsumed by that of her husband at the end of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-2). Patricia Meyer Spacks’s chapter on ‘The Woman as Artist’ in *The Female Imagination* (1976) shares the concern whether a woman can reconcile work and love, asking: ‘Is the cost of achievement the loss of relationship?’<sup>13</sup> For Spacks, desire for fame constitutes another means of wanting to be loved. Whilst there is power in cultivating a celebrated accomplishment, success could easily prove to be a barrier or replacement for a happy personal life. Noting the lack of professional success for artist heroines in literature, Spacks’s focus is on failure.<sup>14</sup> However, this outlook needs to be reappraised in relation to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock’s argument that success within a limited context creates a unique experience which translates into original work.<sup>15</sup>

Given the generic blur between the Bildungsroman and the Künstlerinroman, the development of the artist is often tied to that of the writer. Deborah Ellen Barker has described how the artist heroine ‘provided women writers with an alter-ego, and allowed them to explore issues of creativity and sexuality which conflicted with the limitations of feminine decorum that readers and critics often expected of the woman writer.’<sup>16</sup> However, Antonia Losano argues that this is an oversimplification, as ‘these two media of female aesthetic production are intimately connected in myriad ways’.<sup>17</sup> In *English Female Artists* Ellen C. Clayton contrasts the fame of writers and artists: ‘Artists, especially English artists, and above all, English Female Artists, as a rule lead quiet, uneventful lives, far more so than

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<sup>13</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women’s Writing* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1976), p. 318.

<sup>14</sup> Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, p. 318-19.

<sup>15</sup> Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Pandora Press, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Ellen Barker, ‘Painting Women: The Woman Artist in Nineteenth Century American Fiction’, Ph.D diss., University of Michigan, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Antonia Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 1. Also see: Antonia Losano, ‘The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58.1 (June 2003), 1-41 (p. 15).

authors.’<sup>18</sup> That said, the quiet, domesticated woman artist reflects well both on her and the women she writes of, and shows the desire for biographical information to enhance the discussion of an artist’s work: ‘Eminently respectable, they affect little display; they leave surprisingly few *bonmots* or personal anecdoteana for the benefit of future biographers.’<sup>19</sup> Although the artist is not simply an avatar for a biographical portrait of the author, the interplay is important as writers and artists challenge biographical readings of their work.

According to Sharon Spencer, the woman artist is ‘a missing character in fiction’. She goes on to state that: ‘It is impossible to name even half a dozen major novels whose female protagonists have devoted their lives to one of the arts, even to dance, music or theatre where women stars have long been accepted’.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 1973, this is a surprising remark given the rising cultural interest in the woman artist during the period. For Linda Nochlin, the answer to her provocative question ‘why have there been no great women artists?’ lies in the institutional exclusion of women from art academies.<sup>21</sup> With women’s art written off as an amateur, ladylike accomplishment not worthy of gallery space, it all too easily becomes seen as ephemeral, domestic work circulated amongst family and friends, rather than as part of the male-dominated art market. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock take this exclusion as a starting point from which to analyse the ‘unique’ position of women’s art, placing value and meaning on the conditions women worked within.<sup>22</sup> Whilst feminist art historians were making a concerted effort to redress the balance and account for the societal conditions which had made the woman artist invisible, the prevalent character of the woman artist in literature evidently remained unexplored. There have always been women artists, and the artist heroine

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<sup>18</sup> Clayton, *English Female Artists*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Clayton, *English Female Artists*, p. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Sharon Spencer, ‘“Femininity” and the woman writer: Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* and the *Diary of Anaïs Nin*’, *Women’s Studies*, 1.3 (1973), 247-57 (p. 247).

<sup>21</sup> Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), pp. 145-78 (p. 176).

<sup>22</sup> Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Pandora Press, 1981).

has long been a literary figure in spite of a lack of critical attention. One only has to remember that the myth of the Maid of Corinth positions a woman at the forefront of the emergence of portrait busts. The problem lies in that the figure of the woman artist does not neatly map onto the stereotypical model provided by the male artist, as represented by Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). It is this discrepancy which accounts for Spencer's comments, echoed by Patricia Meyer Spacks when she asks: 'Where is the female equivalent of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*?'<sup>23</sup>

Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964) outlines the inner conflict between life and art experienced by the artist, dividing the type between those who seek out experience to fuel their creative powers and those who retreat from society.<sup>24</sup> Despite a brief consideration of the model provided by Madam de Staël's *Corinne* (1807), Beebe's analysis is centred upon the male experience, describing a stereotype that emerges in the Romantic era, but that has not really changed post-Joyce. A selfish, sensitive, singular figure, waging an internal war between the spiritual and sexual, the male artist hero is static. Reading Beebe's work, Linda Huf argues that 'he does not see that women's artist novels are so unlike men's',<sup>25</sup> and, therefore, responds by outlining five key differences which can be summarized as follows:

1. Temperament: the male artist is feminized as sensitive and guilt-ridden, but the woman artist bears the masculine traits of being athletic and daring.
2. Ruling Conflict: a male artist is torn between his spiritual life (his work) and his sensual life (experience), whereas a woman is torn between the conflicting demands of her work and her womanhood.

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<sup>23</sup> Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

<sup>25</sup> Linda Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1983), p. 4.

3. A sexually conventional love rival: the difference or ‘otherness’ of the woman artist is emphasized by her contrast to a passive young blonde who fully embodies the feminine role.
4. Want of a Muse: a man does not fulfil the inspiring role of muse for a woman artist: ‘rather they are despots or dunces who drag her down.’
5. Radicalism: the artist heroine may be a rebel who fights for the rights of woman, but she is also plagued by self-doubt having internalized society’s expectations of women.<sup>26</sup>

In proposing a swap in masculine/feminine temperament, Huf does challenge the idea of gender essentialism. However, this remains a binary list, focused on differentiating the woman artist as a character type, and does not address the language or form of the novel, nor the socio-historical context. Artistic talent is not an isolated trait but the product of a certain context, with the gender, class, sexuality, and nationality of the artist all playing a role in the reception of their work. Therefore, it is time to reappraise the character of the woman artist from an intersectional perspective. Huf’s ensuing analysis of the artist heroine focuses on American literature of the twentieth century, reflecting the trend for much of the work done on the artist heroine to be focused on examples from the nineteenth century onwards.

Deborah Cherry’s *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (1993), along with Clarissa Campbell Orr’s edited collection *Women in the Victorian Art World* (1995), Jo Devereux’s , *The Making of Women Artists in Victorian England* (2016), and Maria Quirk’s *Women, Art and Money in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (2019), all provide rich consideration of the working conditions of women artists in the nineteenth century, whilst Hilary Fraser’s *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century* (2014) expands on women’s contributions to art history through an analysis of their writings. Literary critics

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<sup>26</sup> See Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, pp. 4-11.

who have written interdisciplinary studies, applying the experience of women artists to that of artist heroines, include Linda M. Lewis in *Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist* (2003), Patricia Zakreski in *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890* (2006), Antonia Losano in *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (2008), and Alexandra K. Wettlaufer in *Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Painting and the Novel in France and Britain, 1800-1860* (2011). Recent work to focus specifically on the arts in British literature of the late-eighteenth century include, Kamilla Elliott's *Portraiture in British Gothic fiction* (2012), and Joe Bray's *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period* (2016). With these studies focusing on the role of art objects rather than the artists themselves, there remains space for a consideration of the role of the woman artist, building upon Jennie Batchelor's research in *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750-1830* (2010). This inspirational study, exploring the intersectional relationship between manual and intellectual labour, reappraises the gendered division of labour by addressing the supposed incompatibility between professional and domestic work. The *Lady's Magazine Project*<sup>27</sup> further reveals the importance of recovering ephemeral, domestic arts, such as embroidery, whilst Janine Barchas's *What Jane Saw* project highlights the important influence of visual culture upon writers through the virtual recreation of two art exhibitions witnessed by Jane Austen: the Joshua Reynolds retrospective of 1813 and Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery as it looked in 1796.<sup>28</sup> Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, in particular, illustrates the reciprocal relationship between writers and artists. My own study is indebted to the research on eighteenth-century visual culture undertaken by John Brewer in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997); Marcia Pointon in *Hanging the Head* (1993) and *Strategies for Showing* (1997); Frances Borzello in *Seeing Ourselves* (1998) and *A World of Our Own* (2000); and

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<sup>27</sup> See, *The Lady's Magazine Project* [online]: <<https://research.kent.ac.uk/the-ladys-magazine/>> [accessed 30/07/20].

<sup>28</sup> See, *What Jane Saw* [online]: <[whatjanesaw.org/index.php](http://whatjanesaw.org/index.php)> [accessed 30/07/20].

Kim Sloan in *A Noble Art* (2000). Ann Bermingham's *Learning to Draw* (2000) has also proved particularly inspirational for its combination of literary and art history, illuminating ideas from cultural, social, and art history with literary examples as she traces the feminization of drawing.

Taking a historicist approach, or more precisely 'art historicist', will provide the key cultural context needed to understand the literary figuration of the artist, enabling the artist heroine to be positioned in relation to the experience of real-life artists and the art and aesthetic debates prominent at the time. Close analysis of the formal properties of the texts, including authorial perspective and paratextual framing, will also serve to enhance the discussion of how the artist heroine is represented.

In December 2019 it was announced that the painter and printmaker Rebecca Salter has been elected as the next President of the Royal Academy of Arts, making her the first woman to hold this position since the institution was founded in 1768. In 1768 access to the Royal Academy schools was not granted to women, but there were two female founder members amongst the ranks of Academicians: Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman. However, it was not considered appropriate for Moser and Kauffman to be depicted amongst their peers in Zoffany's group portrait of the academicians attending a life drawing class. Owing to the potential for the experiences of women artists to influence the literary depiction of artist heroines, Angelica Kauffman, Maria Cosway, Ann Seymour Damer, and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun all provide prominent case studies.

The 1760s mark the starting point of this study owing to the cultural context. The foundation of a Royal Academy of Art in 1768 is central to the discussion surrounding the power of the arts to improve a nation. The scope of the thesis will allow for a consideration of examples both pre- and post-*Corinne*, before concluding with a discussion of Anne Brontë's

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in order to consider how a text from the 1840s looks back to the Regency period in its treatment of the artist heroine. The thesis will, therefore, fill a gap in scholarship by shifting the focus to the period before women's acceptance to the Royal Academy schools in 1860.

The surge in artist-centred novels from the mid-nineteenth century, which often form the basis of existing criticism of the artist heroine, includes: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), Amelia Edward's *Barbara's History* (1856), Charlotte Yonge's *Pillars of the House* (1873), Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *Miss Angel* (1875), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis* (1877). Deborah Barker reads Louisa May Alcott's incomplete work *Diana and Persis* as a direct response to Phelps's *Avis* in its attempt to reconcile work and marriage. Inspired by her artist sister May, *Diana and Persis* reflects how the *Künstlerinroman* blends the sister arts, with Barker noting how different art forms are used by Alcott to stand for different characteristics.<sup>29</sup> However, these ideas are found in earlier examples of women's writing to be analysed in this thesis.

The texts selected for analysis intentionally constitute a mix of canonized and more unfamiliar works paired for comparison in order to chart the intertextual conversation staged between them. The call and response between writers will be discussed in relation to Elaine Showalter's argument in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) that change can emerge through a process of imitation.<sup>30</sup> My choice to focus mainly upon novels, and how novelistic depictions relate to those found in plays and poetry, is symptomatic of the feminization of the novel form through the course of the 1790s. With women responsible for in excess of half of new publications by the 1810s, Anthony Mandal's research positions women as 'the primary

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<sup>29</sup> Deborah Barker, *Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature: Portraits of the Woman Artist* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, New Revised Edition (London: Virago, 1982). This idea will be analysed further in Chapter Three of this thesis, in relation to the idea of women painting copies.

consumers, experimenters, and producers of fiction' during the Romantic period.<sup>31</sup> However, Hannah More lamented that the accessibility of the novel only exacerbated the potential to corrupt: 'Such is the frightful felicity of this species of composition, that every raw girl, while she reads, is tempted to fancy that she can also write.'<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the controversial aspect to novel writing makes for an interesting comparison between different modes of women's art and women's writing in terms of what was deemed socially acceptable artistic practice. Although the focus will primarily be on the visual arts of painting, drawing, and sculpture, there will be overlaps with poetry and music as writers employ the intersection of the 'sister arts' not only to contrast characters but to comment upon the similarities and differences between the woman artist and the woman writer. My use of the terms 'woman artist' and 'woman writer', as opposed to female, is a means of placing the focus on biological sex rather than a societal construct of gender. Where female is used, as in the reference to 'female accomplishments', it is to signal that social expectations of gender are intrinsic to the meaning. The value placed on artistic accomplishment means that artistic talent is such a prolific character trait that most heroines of the period possess artistic skill of some kind. However, it is not intended that this thesis will provide a comprehensive list of artist heroines. Thematic rather than strictly chronological, the five chapters of this thesis aim to highlight key examples from across the period which provide sustained engagement with the arts by entering into the debate surrounding the role of the woman artist.

Taking Richard Samuel's *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (1778) as a starting point, the opening chapter aims to interrogate the position of

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony Mandal, 'Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in the Romantic Period*, ed. by Devoney Looser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 16-31 (p. 25). Mandal's statistics are drawn from Garside, Raven, and Schöwerling (eds.), *The English Novel, 1770-1829* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Garside, Belanger, and Ragaz, *British Fiction, 1800-1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception*, designer A. Mandal (2004), [online]: <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/index.html>> [accessed 01/08/20].

<sup>32</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on The Modern System of Female Education*, in *The Works of Hannah More*, Vol I of II (Boston: S. G. Goodrich, 1827), pp. 324-434 (p. 359).

artistic women in mid-eighteenth-century society. Samuel's allegorical depiction of nine celebrated women painted in the guise of Muses singles out figures of literary, artistic, and musical renown to function as a visual representation of the Bluestocking ideal that women play an active, civilizing role in intellectual life. However, the all-female grouping in Samuel's portrait actually serves to isolate the women as shining examples of their sex, rather than integrate them into polite society. This chapter will, therefore, address the place of women in the discourse of national progress by analysing Samuel's painting in relation to the literary example of an idealized artistic community of women found in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762). Scott's work will in turn provide a point of comparison with Mary Hamilton's *Munster Village* (1779); a novel which contrasts the unhappy fate of a female artist working in isolation, with the creation of a mixed utopian artistic community. Although utopian settings aim to present a model for national improvement, Scott and Hamilton actually maintain the *status quo* in their work by describing the implementation of hierarchically segregated modes of habitation, education, and employment designed to keep people in their place. It will be argued, therefore, that the isolation of women is detrimental to their reputation and wellbeing as well as to national progress.

Chapter Two will develop the theme of the segregated position of women in society with a discussion of how the concept of female accomplishment intersects with class. Charting the feminization of artistic accomplishment will not only reveal the dangerous propensity to view women's art as a means of attracting the male gaze, but also illustrate the intrinsic barriers women face in being deemed worthy of the term 'accomplished' in the first place. As Ann Bermingham has noted, the very concept of accomplishment is rooted in what she terms the 'trope of lack',<sup>33</sup> as young girls are encouraged to acquire a seemingly endless list of talents in order to be considered marriageable. James Gillray's caricature *Farmer Giles*

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<sup>33</sup> Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 188.

*and his wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their neighbours, on her return from school* (1809), depicts the pretensions of the emergent middle class using artistic accomplishments as a means to increase their daughters' marriage prospects. However, it is suggested that Betty falls short in skill as well as in terms of accepted beauty standards, with her inflated appearance standing for the consumption of the arts in the hope of attracting a suitor. Many novels, including Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of Wife* (1809), ridicule the undesirable attempts of young girls to be deemed accomplished, presenting the limited acquisition of various skills as no more than a ploy to attract the male gaze. However, this chapter will focus on the works of Charlotte Smith. Taking the novels of Charlotte Smith as a case study, this chapter will show how Smith uses, and subverts, the established tropes surrounding the characterization of the accomplished female, as she reclaims women's art from the domain of frivolous accomplishments. For example, in Smith's first novel, *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* (1788), the eponymous heroine resists a biographical reading of her sketches which would position her work as a courtship ritual, by insisting that her drawings of Delamere do not reveal a romantic attachment to him. In *The Old Manor House* (1794), Smith ridicules the stereotypical 'artful' young girl using her accomplishments to snare a rich husband, however this novel subverts the reader's expectations by presenting a low-born heroine with the virtue worthy of an aristocratic lady and the skills required to support herself through artistic labour.

Chapter Three will develop the discussion of professional artistic labour through reference to the production of copies. The opening epigraph to this Introduction, taken from Ellen C. Clayton's *English Female Artists*, particularly highlights the association between women artists and copying. Even though all artistic training would use the copy as a starting point women did not often have the opportunity to further hone their talent. Following the contextualization of the status of the artists' copy during the period, this chapter will consider

how Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley use copyists as a means of raising the value attached to women's art, whilst self-reflexively alluding to their own creative output. Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) stands out amongst Gothic novels of the period for its portrayal of a heroine who is able to use her artistic talent to support herself financially. Paying particular attention to the valuable and highly sought-after copies Ellena produces from the excavated ruins of Herculaneum will show how Radcliffe raises the status of copies from the realms of insignificance described by Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses on Art* (1769-1790). This chapter will then turn to address the place of women's art in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818/31) and *The Last Man* (1826). In looking back to Radcliffe to create something new, Shelley shows that there is scope for creativity within the bounds of imitation.

The copy may be considered a suitably feminine art form, but sculpture is often thought of as the least suitable artistic pursuit for women owing to the mess, noise and dirt generated as well as the physical strength required. The idea of transgression associated with the sculptress leads to the assumption that women sculptors subvert heterosexual gender norms. As a notable example of a sculptor whose private life excited public scrutiny, Anne Seymour Damer provides the starting point for Chapter Four to consider the characterization of women sculptors. Damer's identity as an artist cannot be fully understood without considering how her work intersects with other aspects of her life, including her gender, class, ancestry, nationality, and sexuality. Her status as an aristocratic widow not only gave her the connections to pursue her chosen career, but provided the means for her to avoid remarriage and live outside of heteronormative ideals. Damer was not only an aristocratic artist, but an accomplished amateur actress and writer, and this chapter will analyse her novel *Belmour* (1801) alongside literary figurations of aristocratic women sculptors based on Damer: Lady Horatia Horton in Hannah Cowley's play *The Town Before You* (1795) and the Baroness Ingersdorf in Anna Maria Porter's novel *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807). Despite

being subject to ridicule for their choice of art form, these characters combine classical knowledge with valuable character insight.

The question of women artists and the nation introduced in Chapter One, returns to the fore in the fifth and final chapter of this thesis, as Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) suggests that the woman artist cannot thrive in England. This highly influential text generated numerous British responses, and this chapter aims to address the British reception of *Corinne* in terms of how women writers have used *Corinne* to question the woman artist's ability to reconcile the competing demands of public and private life. Where E.M. Foster's satirical novel *The Corinna of England, or a Heroine in the Shade* (1809) ridicules the bathetic presumption of a woman proclaiming herself to be an artistic genius, women poets have found inspiration in the figure of Corinne to voice their own struggles. Owing to Corinne's fame as an improvisatrice, poetry provides a more apt form through which to express the inner conflict of the poet, and Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon represent two women poets to engage with the Corinne myth in terms of the lasting value of women's art in the face of unrequited or lost love. Whilst Hemans and Landon's work raises the question of whether a woman artist can combine professional success with happiness as a wife and mother, the competing demands of woman and artist are not reconciled until the publication of Elizabeth Barrett Browning 'novel in verse', *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

This thesis will then conclude with an epilogue considering Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in relation to Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811), in order to assess the influence a text from the Regency period has upon a mid-nineteenth-century depiction of a woman artist. *Self-Control* does not merely serve as a source text for Brontë, but lies beneath *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as a palimpsest, the trace of which can still be seen as Brontë reclaims women's art from the hold of the male gaze. Laura Montreville and Helen Graham both have their work misappraised by male love interests, but Helen harnesses

the power of anonymity, reflecting Brontë's prefatory exclamation that the mind has no sex. It will be argued that by setting her novel in the 1820s, Brontë in effect looks back in order to look forward.

At this particular moment, art historians are still working hard to 'recover' lost, forgotten, or neglected women artists. A series of academic conferences and prominent public exhibitions, including the National Portrait Gallery's *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* (2019-20), have been bringing women's art to the forefront of discussion, questioning how we value and categorize women's artistic labour. This thesis is, therefore, perfectly placed to respond to this cultural shift and open up a dialogue between literary critics and art historians in terms of how the eighteenth-century woman artist was represented in fiction of the period.

## Chapter One

### **Living Muses: The Woman Artist as a Figure of National Progress in Richard Samuel's *Portraits of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (1778), Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), and Mary Hamilton's *Munster Village* (1778)**

The encouragement of the polite arts is the striking characteristic that distinguishes a civilised people from a nation of Barbarians; they soften the manners, humanise the mind and give birth to attention and civility which are the basis of politeness and render society truly amiable and engaging.

Richard Samuel, *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting* (1786)<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the many portraits, landscapes, and history paintings competing for their attention, visitors to the Royal Academy exhibition of 1779 would have seen a painting that has become central to discussions surrounding the representation of female creativity. Richard Samuel's *Portraits of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (1778) singles out figures of literary, artistic, and musical renown to function as a visual representation of the Bluestocking ideal that women play an active, civilizing role in intellectual life. However, the National Portrait Gallery's catalogue entry for the painting concedes that the 'concept of this picture is rather more interesting than its substance'.<sup>2</sup> Samuel's allegorical depiction of nine celebrated women painted in the guise of Muses may not display the technical ability of the Old Masters, but for Elizabeth Eger the importance of this painting lies in it 'capturing the moment when English women as a group first gained acceptance as powerful contributors to the artistic world'.<sup>3</sup> Its value lies in the visual record it provides of women's creativity being celebrated, with the Muses adopted as a strategy to inspire national progress. This chapter seeks to address the place of women in the discourse of national progress by analysing

<sup>1</sup> Richard Samuel, *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting* (London: Thomas Wilkins, 1786), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> National Portrait Gallery, 'Extended Catalogue Entry: *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*', [n.d.], [online]: <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mw00328>> [accessed 08/09/17].

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

Samuel's painting in relation to the literary examples of idealized artistic communities found in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) and Mary Hamilton's *Munster Village* (1778), with a particular focus on how a dialogue is established between these works as they reimagine Raphael's frescoes of *Parnassus* and *The School of Athens* (c. 1509-1511) as models to be emulated.

Through an appeal to an imagined classical past, the Muse can dignify the artist in the present, but can also prove a problematic figure. As both an active creator of art and a passive source of artistic inspiration, the inherent duality of the Muse embodies the tension between the woman as artist and the artist as aesthetic object. In *Monuments and Maidens* (1985), Marina Warner addresses the paradox at the heart of using the female form as an allegory: whilst an allegory calls for an *apt* resemblance between concepts, the appeal to the female can be an unexpected means of representing liberty, justice, or victory within a patriarchal society. Despite the 'unlikelihood of women practicing the concepts they represent', Warner suggests that female symbols have the transformative potential to inspire change: 'a symbolized female presence both gives and takes value and meaning in relation to actual women, and contains the potential for the affirmation not only of women themselves but of the general good they might represent.'<sup>4</sup> Given the pleasing power of allegory to persuade, beauty and virtue can work together to inspire change.

By merging the mythical figures of the Muses with the identities of real women, Samuel creates tension between the real and the ideal in his work. It can be questioned, therefore, whether the painting celebrates the active role women were playing in literary and artistic circles during the eighteenth century, or whether Samuel depicts idealized portraits of a few exemplary women in the hope of inspiring improvement through emulation. Taking

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<sup>4</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Picador, Pan Books, 1987), p. xx.

Samuel's use of the *Living Muses* as a means to imagine an Arcadia where women can flourish, the painting can be compared with utopian fiction in terms of the presentation of a model to be imitated. With utopian fiction enabling a writer to critique society through the presentation of an idealized alternative, works of this kind can offer an insight into the perceived role of the woman artist in the improvement of the nation. Although utopian settings aim to present a model for national improvement, they can also inadvertently reveal the bleak situation faced by women. Both Sarah Scott and Mary Hamilton maintain the *status quo* in their utopian works by describing the implementation of social structures that keep people in their place. In highlighting the importance of imitation for reform, it will be argued that the isolation of women in an all-female community is detrimental to their reputation, wellbeing, and national progress. Following a contextualizing discussion of Samuel's painting in relation to the discourse surrounding women and national progress, analysis of Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Hamilton's *Munster Village* will show how women writers of the period have also used a classically-inspired setting as a means to respond to one another and comment upon the place of the woman artist in society.

### ***The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain & the Bluestocking Ideal of the Sister Arts***

In Samuel's *Portraits of the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, perhaps better known as *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1778), the literary critic and Bluestocking hostess, Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800), sits upon the temple steps surrounded by a coterie of some of the most celebrated women of the day. As the 'Queen of the Blues', Montagu is bestowed with the golden crown of Calliope, the chief of the Muses, who aptly presides over eloquence. The historian Catharine Macaulay (1731-1791) and the playwright Elizabeth Griffith (1727-1793) are positioned either side of Montagu, whilst the writer Hannah More (1745-1833) and the novelist Charlotte Lennox (1730-1804) stand behind. At the centre of

the composition stands Elizabeth Linley Sheridan (1754-1792), the celebrated soprano. Completing the group are Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), the classical scholar and translator of Epictetus, and the poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), who look on as the artist Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) sits behind her easel, painting the scene before her. Whilst there is no evidence that these women ever met as a group, each has been selected as the leading talent in her field to compile an imaginary meeting of the Bluestocking circle.



Figure 1.1: Richard Samuel, *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (1778), oil on canvas, 132 cm x 155 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 4905, image © National Portrait Gallery.

The scene depicted is one of harmonious creativity. The convivial atmosphere created by the composition of the conversation piece effectively invites the spectator into the group,

mimicking the semi-circular arrangement favoured by Montagu at her gatherings as a means of facilitating conversation. Samuel shows how such a supportive environment is conducive to creativity by presenting music, art, and conversation in full flow. As a visual representation of the sister arts ideal, the women are portrayed as being both intellectually and creatively stimulated by one another's company. As stated in Jean H. Hagstrum's influential study of the sister arts: 'Men who cherish more than one of the arts have often made comparisons between them.'<sup>5</sup> The term 'sister' situates the arts in a distinctly female relationship. However, as noted by Thora Brylowe, the allegorical depiction of the arts as sisters suggests similarity as well as difference: 'Sisterhood invites comparison but it does not suggest equality.' Whilst the potential for sisters to be 'friendly and antagonistic', emphasized by Brylowe, should not be overlooked,<sup>6</sup> Samuel's work focuses on the positive aspects of depicting the Bluestocking circle as Muses who embody the sister arts ideal. In 1700 a collective of women had published a poetic anthology under the assumed personas of the nine Muses as a response to the death of John Dryden. *The Nine Muses* (1700)<sup>7</sup> represents the first collaborative project undertaken by women writers in England, with Anne Kelley describing it as: 'one of the stronger bids by women writers of this period for parity and respect.'<sup>8</sup> The collection works to legitimize women's writing through the *Nine Muses*' self-presentation as a creative force aligned with Dryden and the classical past, not as isolated rivals. Samuel similarly applies the guise of the Muses to the Bluestockings to present a harmonious interaction, whereby group artistic practice reciprocally influences the endeavours of each individual and raises the status of women artists and writers.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> Thora Brylowe, *Romantic Art in Practice: Cultural Work and the Sister Arts, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 3. There will be scope to develop the discussion of the sister arts in terms of how women poets respond to the Horatian *ut pictura poesis* tradition in Chapter Five of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Anon, *The Nine Muses; Or, Poems Written by Nine severall Ladies Upon the death of the late Famous John Dryden, Esq.* (London: Richard Basset, 1700).

<sup>8</sup> Anne Kelley, "'What a Pox have the Women to do with the Muses?'" *The Nine Muses* (1700): Emulation or Appropriation?', *Women's Writing*, 17 (2010), 5-29 (p. 24).

The salons of Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, Frances Boscawen and others had been initiated in the 1750s as a means of involving women in intellectual life. The mixed, informal meetings shifted focus away from court patronage and allowed writers, artists, and thinkers of different backgrounds to come together and share ideas. Here, the idle gossip, heavy drinking, and equally heavy gambling of typical society gatherings were replaced with tea and conversation with the aim of showing that women are rational creatures, who should not be barred from intellectual pursuits. In ‘Of Refinement in the Arts’ (1752), David Hume described the formation of such ‘clubs’ as a direct consequence of national improvement in the arts and sciences:

The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become: nor is it possible, that, when possessed of a fund of conversation, they should be contented to remain in solitude, or live with their fellow-citizens in that distant manner, which is peculiar to ignorant and barbarous nations. They flock to cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture. Curiosity allures the wise; vanity the foolish; and pleasure both. Particular clubs and societies are everywhere formed: both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace. So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an increase of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment.<sup>9</sup>

The refinement of the arts goes hand in hand with the refinement of manners, and Hume shares the Bluestocking view that mixed gatherings, bringing men and women together, would have reciprocal benefit and a positive effect on society. However, the environment where ‘both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner’ in order to ‘receive and communicate knowledge’ described by Hume is captured by Samuel as a purely female grouping. The painting, therefore, contributes to the figure of the Bluestocking increasingly

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<sup>9</sup> David Hume, ‘Of Refinement in the Arts’, in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (New York: Cosimo, 2006), pp. 275-88 (p. 278).

being associated with learned women during the 1770s, even though the term is supposed to have originated in reference to the informal choice of hosiery favoured by the botanist Benjamin Stillingfleet (1702-1771), who eschewed the black silk stockings worn to court gatherings in favour of blue worsted. The term Bluestocking gained particularly negative connotations once associated with women who were considered unfeminine in their demands for education, as seen in Thomas Rowlandson's caricature, *The Breaking Up of the Blue Stocking Club* (1815).

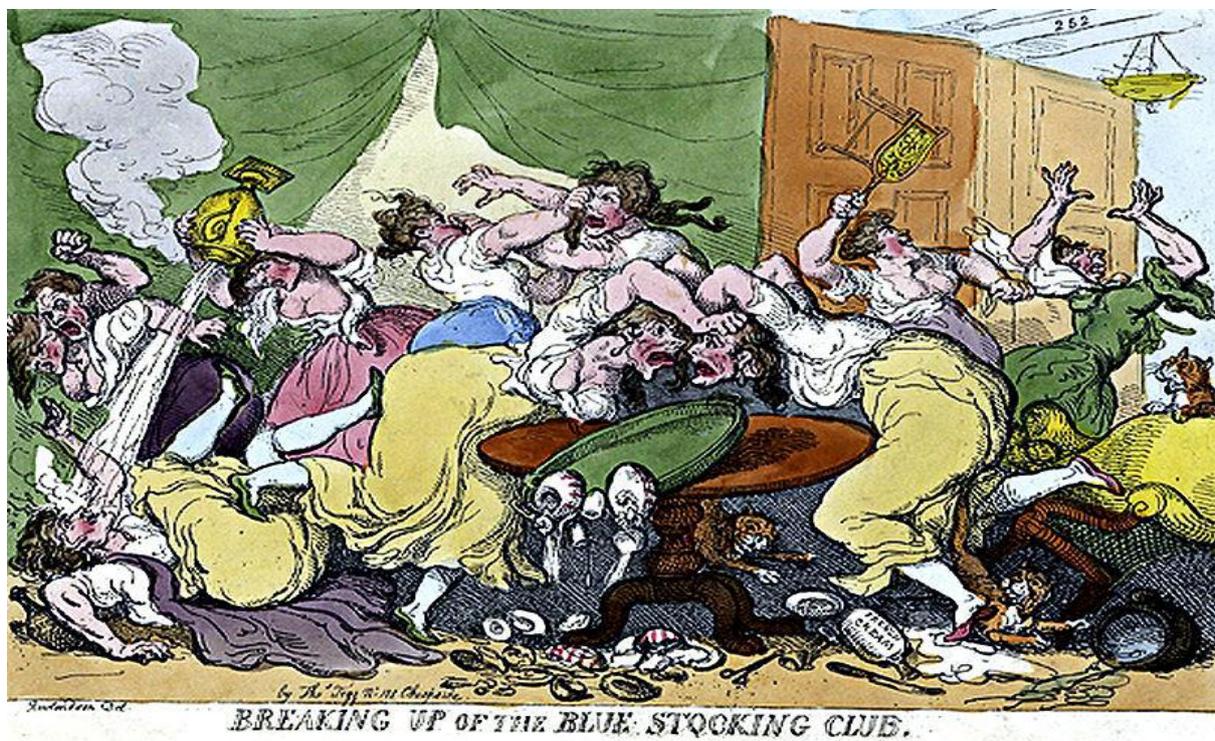


Figure 1.2: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Breaking Up of the Blue Stocking Club* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1815), The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, New York Public Library (Wikimedia Commons).

This image stands in direct contrast to Samuel's idealized, harmonious picture of Bluestocking feminism. Here, a *mêlée* has erupted during a literary salon, and women are exchanging blows, grabbing each other by the hair, grappling over tables, and throwing chairs. The politeness of the tea table has been utterly abandoned as a tray of china is overturned and one woman empties an urn of hot water over her adversary. What's more, the

spilt bottle of French cream associates the women with revolutionary politics. Isolating the Bluestockings as a female group creates curiosity and unease regarding how these women behave behind closed doors. Elizabeth Eger asks whether Rowlandson's print can be taken as a signal of the end of the Bluestocking era, observing that the hostility towards the Bluestockings 'was exacerbated by the cultural anxiety caused by the French Revolution and its aftermath in Britain'.<sup>10</sup> The second generation of Bluestockings, including the likes of Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft, were considered too radical, whether in their politics or their personal lives, but the hostility can be traced further back. Lucy Peltz charts the pejoration of the term Bluestocking through the turmoil of the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815: 'Against this backdrop of revolution in America and France, relations between the sexes – and the proper roles of each – were increasingly challenged.'<sup>11</sup> Anxiety surrounding the stability of society manifested as backlash against women who were perceived as encroaching upon masculine genres. However, Catherine Macaulay, a staunch republican in her history writing, is still included amongst more acceptable figures in Samuel's painting. In the merger of sister arts and political stances within an idealized classical setting, Samuel mediates a process of gradual change through harmonious emulation, rather than inciting violent revolution.

Although Angela Rosenthal believes that the 'intimacy and isolation of the muses' circle in Samuel's painting reflects, to some degree, the actual character of the closed female networks within which these women operated',<sup>12</sup> Samuel's decision to paint his nine Muses in isolation means that the Bluestocking message that women can participate in public, intellectual life is to some extent lost. However, the female grouping does also reduce the

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Eger, 'The Bluestocking Legacy', in *Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 127-51 (pp. 128-29).

<sup>11</sup> Lucy Peltz, 'A Revolution in Female Manners', in *Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 95-125 (p. 95).

<sup>12</sup> Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art & Sensibility* (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 159.

scope for viewing a Muse as solely a passive figure of male inspiration. In this respect, Samuel's painting differs from earlier representations of Parnassus in which the Muses are represented facilitating male creativity, such as Raphael's fresco at the Vatican.

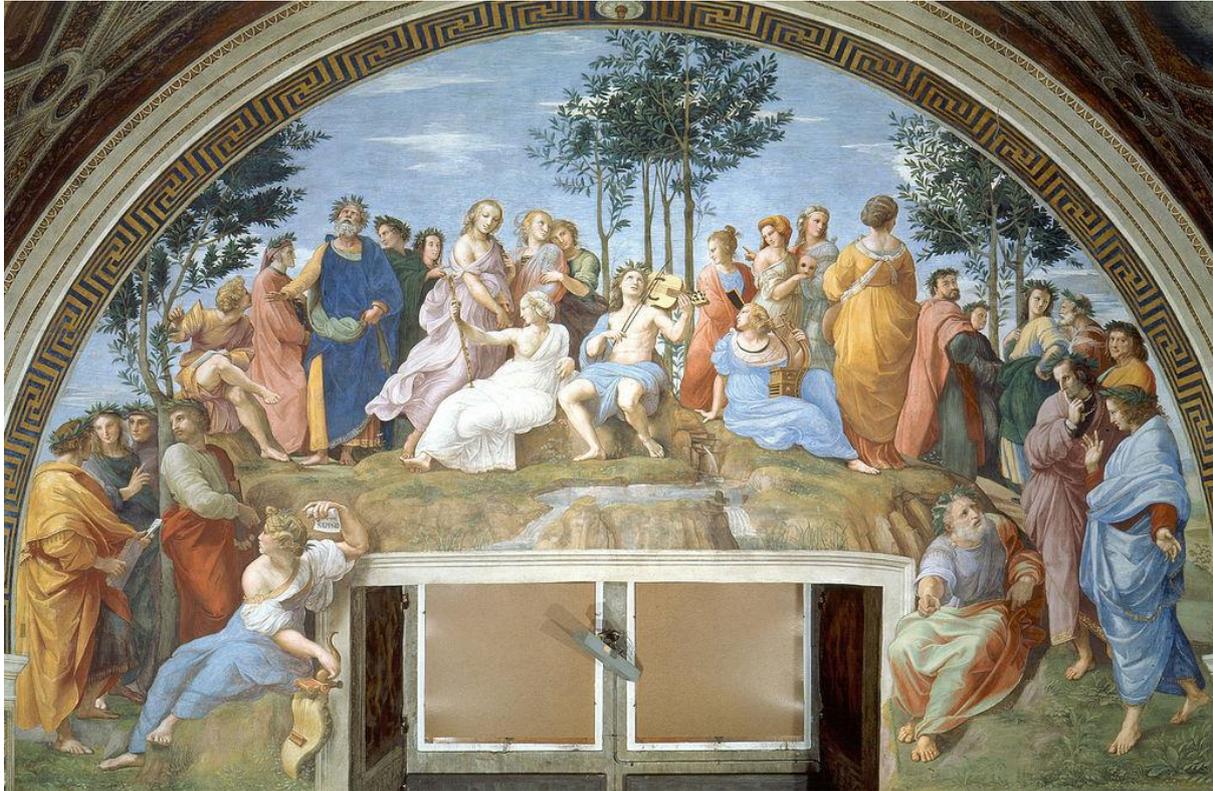


Figure 1.3: Raphael, *Parnassus* (c. 1511), Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican (Wikimedia Commons).

In Raphael's fresco of *Parnassus* (c.1511) Apollo and the nine Muses appear with nine poets from antiquity and nine contemporary poets. This image in turn inspired Nicolas Poussin's *Parnassus* (1626), which similarly features male figures, including Homer and Virgil, receiving inspiration from the Muses at the Castalian spring. Samuel, in contrast, places all focus on the Muses as creative agents in their own right. The significance of representing the female artist as a Muse warrants further consideration.

## The Artist as Muse

In Greek mythology the Muses are the goddesses who preside over the arts. Although their number and origin is debated, with some sources citing them as the offspring of Uranus and Gaia, whilst others say they are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the iconographic representation of the Muses in art over the centuries tends to clearly differentiate each figure. For example, Clio, Muse of history, can be identified by the books and scroll she carries, whilst Euterpe, Muse of song and elegiac poetry, plays a flute. The Muses embody the arts *and* inspire artistic creativity in others. No mortal can challenge their skill without inciting jealousy and rage.

During the eighteenth century, the Muse was a popular figure in art and literature. Samuel's painting followed the French 'Muse Portraiture' tradition to emerge during the period, and came in the wake of a series of publications in praise of female learning or creativity to allude to the Muses, including John Duncombe's 'The Femiinad' (1754).<sup>13</sup> In *An Essay on the Pleasures and Advantages of Female Literature* (1741), Wetenhall Wilkes questions: 'If it were intended by Nature, that Man should Monopolize all Learning to himself, why were the Muses Female?'<sup>14</sup> Here the Muse is not seen in the present-day sense, occupying the passive position of inspiring male creativity, but as one most highly skilled in producing works of her own. George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) was to be the first of many collective biographies to celebrate female subjects with unblemished reputations, including the artists Anne Killigrew and Esther Inglis.<sup>15</sup> However, not all Ballard's readers shared his enthusiasm, and soon heard of 'several persons who are pleased to perstringe me and my illustrious Train of Learned and worthy Ladies.' According

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<sup>13</sup> John Duncombe, *The Femiinad: Or, Female Genius. A poem.* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London : printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1757).

<sup>14</sup> Wetenhall Wilkes, *An Essay on the Pleasures and Advantages of Female Literature* (London: printed by the author, and sold by T. Cooper, and R. Caswell, 1741), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1752).

to his critics, women ‘were never intended or design’d to be made acquainted with the Arts & Sciences.’<sup>16</sup> His correspondent, Charles Lyttelton, himself wrote: ‘I find very few of them stand in a higher Rank as Authors than Poetasters and Translators.’<sup>17</sup> However, Lucy Peltz records twenty such biographies published during the fifty year period to follow, noting: ‘The purpose of such publications was to hold up women’s collective intellectual and artistic ability as a mark of Britain’s civilized status and thereby construct a tradition of female achievement.’<sup>18</sup> By bringing ‘the lives of a great many learned and gifted women from the past to public attention’ these anthologies ‘boost the position of the modern woman of genius’.<sup>19</sup> As Peltz argues, *The Nine Living Muses* serves a similar purpose in that an appeal to the past provides validation. For Peltz, adopting the Muses as a framework, as seen in the works of Wilkes and Duncombe, is a strategy Samuel employs to defend literary and artistic women from possible hostility.<sup>20</sup> Given that women could easily be accused of neglecting the domestic duties of a daughter, wife, or mother in pursuit of fame, one way to counteract the spectacle of display was to adopt a dignified, classical setting.

In his *Seventh Discourse on Art* (1776) delivered to students of the Royal Academy, Joshua Reynolds discusses the general prejudice in favour of classical antiquity, and advises painting female subjects in antique dress as a means of shaping popular judgement:

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<sup>16</sup> George Ballard, Letter to Charles Lyttelton, [undated], Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 42, fol. 29, quoted in Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Lyttelton, Letter to Thomas Birch, 9 April 1753, British Library, Add. MS 4312, fol. 314, quoted in Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Lucy Peltz, ‘Living Muses: Constructing and Celebrating the Professional Woman in Literature and the Arts’, in *Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 56-93 (p. 64).

<sup>19</sup> Peltz, ‘Living Muses’, p. 65

<sup>20</sup> Peltz, ‘Living Muses’, p. 60.

He, therefore, who, in his practice of portrait-painting, wishes to dignify his subject, which we will suppose to be a lady, will not paint her in the modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity. He will take care that his work shall correspond to those ideas and that imagination which he knows will regulate the judgement of others; and therefore dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for the sake of likeness.<sup>21</sup>

Representing a female sitter as a Muse is a strategy for preserving her dignity whilst symbolically celebrating her role in society. Marcia Pointon identifies a ‘conceptual split’ in portraiture from the 1770s, whereby ‘a female subject known to be of the lowest class’, such as Emma Hamilton, could be ‘transformed by art into the highest ideal’.<sup>22</sup> Pointon thus emphasizes the ‘transformative capacities’ of Reynolds’s allegorical female portraiture noting, ‘its potential for representing social order whilst simultaneously providing a site of fantasy’.<sup>23</sup> What Pointon describes constitutes a type of double vision. However, whilst an eighteenth-century audience would be used to the experience of viewing a portrait that simultaneously embodies both a society beauty and a mythological figure, Samuel’s portraits differ in that they are not accurate likenesses. Samuel adheres to Reynolds’s advice in presenting his subjects draped in vaguely classical garb, but the effect he achieves is an aesthetically appealing, if generalized representation of a collective. In consequence, the ideal far outweighs the real.

Gill Perry describes the role of the Muse in eighteenth-century portraiture as ‘double-edged’, for although adopting the role ‘could suggest active creativity on the part of the sitter [...] as the female object of a male painter’s inspiration, the role of Muse in a contemporary

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua Reynolds, ‘Discourse VII’ (December 1776), *Discourses on Art*, ed. by John Burnet (London: Carpenter, 1842), pp. 112–40 (p. 138).

<sup>22</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture, 1665–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, p. 175.

portrait could also passively inspire.’<sup>24</sup> Perry concludes that: ‘The female Muse could only be seen to appropriate masculine creativity if she were represented as both the inspiration and the creative artist, if she were represented in the dual role of symbolic Muse and practising artist.’<sup>25</sup> However, this duality is intrinsic to the Muse and the female artist, who both inevitably have to balance an appearance of passive femininity with active productivity. The Muse is, therefore, an apt guise for the female artist. The elision between the identity of the sitter and that of the mythological figure dignifies the role of the artist whilst embodying their shared struggle to be seen as an agent of creativity without abandoning societal expectations of femininity. Cindy McCreery believes that by painting the women as Muses, Samuel’s design ‘represents the women as passive subjects rather than active agents’.<sup>26</sup> Although the women may appear demure, they are portrayed as being actively engaged in literary and artistic pursuits. The figure of the Muse has the potential to bring together women of different social, economic, and political backgrounds to be celebrated for their talent. The problem is that whilst Samuel does elevate the status of female creativity by associating his Living Muses with the nine Muses of Greek mythology, he does so without celebrating the specific talents and achievements of each individual.

Of the nine women Samuel depicts, only Angelica Kauffman and Elizabeth Linley Sheridan are shown displaying the talents they were renowned for. As Peltz attests, ‘What interested him – and what departed from the usual selection of literary Muses – was the introduction of new artistic professions such as painting and singing.’<sup>27</sup> The spectator’s attention is particularly drawn to the central figure of Sheridan, as she sings for the assembled group. Her lyre associates her with Erato, Muse of love poetry, as opposed to Euterpe, the

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<sup>24</sup> Gill Perry, ‘The British Sappho’: Borrowed Identities and the Representation of Women Artists in Late Eighteenth-Century British Art’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 18.1 (1995), 44-57 (p. 48).

<sup>25</sup> Perry, ‘The British Sappho’, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze: Prints of Women in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Peltz, ‘Living Muses’, p. 62.

Muse of music and song, who is usually identified by her flute. Charlotte Lennox, meanwhile, who was not known to possess any particular musical talent, plucks the strings of a lute. Catharine Macaulay is shown unrolling a scroll that identifies her as Clio, Muse of history, and Elizabeth Griffith intently studies a tablet, but whilst these may be props which associate them with their chosen professions, they are not in the privileged position of being able to perform. Angelica Kauffman could be cast as an all-seeing Urania, Muse of astronomy, but her easel does not actually align her with a particular Muse. Samuel was not so much concerned with identifying each woman as a specific Muse, as with aestheticizing the idea of female creativity. In presenting a scene where a group of attractive women preside over the arts, Samuel associates the idea of female accomplishment with beauty. The poise required to play a musical instrument, or the graceful turn of the neck made to survey the scene being painted, position the body to appear at advantage, so that the appearance of producing art is valued more than what is actually produced.

Samuel promotes an ideal beauty standard to the extent that it has been questioned whether the painting can be accurately termed a work of portraiture at all, with the depiction of a mythological scene aligning the work closer to the category of history painting. Deriving from the Italian word *istoria*, meaning story, history paintings present narratives from the Bible and classical mythology, as well as historical events, in a didactic manner.<sup>28</sup> With history painting considered the most prestigious genre in the Academy system, Samuel would have understood the benefit of painting portraits in this way in terms of harnessing the possibility to promote his own career and the work of his sitters, as well as inspiring others to follow suit. The lack of resemblance between the nine women and their likenesses can be attributed to the fact that Samuel did not arrange for any of the women to sit for him. With so vague an attempt at capturing any likeness it is little surprise that the women had difficulty

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<sup>28</sup> National Gallery, 'Glossary: History painting' [n.d.], [online]: <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/history-paintings>> [accessed 01/06/20].

recognizing themselves. Elizabeth Carter wrote to Montagu: ‘by the testimony of my eyes, I cannot very exactly tell which is you, and which is I, and which is anybody else.’<sup>29</sup> Carter was more wary of fame and the ensuing possibility for censure than Montagu, but she was amused that they had all been made to look so pretty. At 59 and 60 years old respectively, Montagu and Carter were the elder stateswomen of the group, but Samuel makes them look as young and nubile as 23-year-old Elizabeth Linley Sheridan. It was an earlier print version of the painting, listing the names of the nine women pictured, that helped identify who the *Living Muses* actually were. In her introduction to *Women, Gender, and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2013), Temma Berg describes Betty Rizzo’s tireless attempts to definitively confirm the identity of the sitters rather than rely on conjecture based upon the key from an earlier print version that differs from the painting. The National Portrait Gallery catalogue entry currently identifies three sitters, namely: Sheridan, Kauffman, and Montague.<sup>30</sup> However, Berg’s records show that this is in flux, with four figures identified in 2010, and just two in 2012.<sup>31</sup> Sheridan and Kauffman are the only sitters whose identification remains constant from their likenesses and professional activities.

For John Brewer it is ‘not clear’ why Samuel selected these particular nine women as his Muses: ‘They were not a coherent group, though many were in Elizabeth Montagu’s circle.’<sup>32</sup> Kate Davies argues that Catharine Macaulay’s republican ideals were at odds with

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Carter, Letter to Elizabeth Montagu, 23 December 1777?, in *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, to Mrs. Montagu, Between the Years 1755 and 1800, Chiefly upon Literary and Moral Subjects*, ed. by Montagu Pennington, Vol. 3 of 3 (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1817), pp. 47-48.

<sup>30</sup> National Portrait Gallery, ‘Extended Catalogue Entry: *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*’ [n.d.], [online]: <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mw00328>> [accessed 08/09/17].

<sup>31</sup> Temma Berg, ‘Introduction’ to *Women, Gender, and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Essays in Memory of Betty Rizzo*, ed. by Temma Berg and Sonia Kane (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2013), pp. xiii-xxv (p. xix).

<sup>32</sup> John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 78.

the nationalist message of the piece,<sup>33</sup> whilst Marcia Pointon questions why Angelica Kauffman was chosen to be included when Mary Moser, her fellow female founder member of the Royal Academy of Art, was left out of the composition.<sup>34</sup> Kauffman was Swiss by birth, thus for McCreery this suggests ‘the paucity of native female artists’ when the painting is supposed to be ‘a patriotic affirmation of Britain’s wealth of female talent’.<sup>35</sup> However, Samuel shows that it is in Great Britain that her talent is truly appreciated and her career can thrive, just as George Keate exclaims in his ‘Epistle to Angelica Kauffman’ (1781). As Davies asserts: ‘It is rather that in Britain such women of literary and artistic achievement exist, or might be named at all.’<sup>36</sup> Taking a positive interpretation of the painting, *The Nine Living Muses* acts as a collective symbol of female creativity as national progress.

### **The Value of Art for National Improvement**

In what was a direct response to the influx of continental art being imported by collectors on the Grand Tour, the Royal Academy of Art was founded in 1768 with the aim of promoting British art. This was to be achieved by training a new generation of artists and promoting their work to the public at an annual exhibition. It is appropriate, therefore, that a painting celebrating the talents of the nine *Living Muses of Great Britain* should have been exhibited at the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1779. Even though women could not receive training at the Academy schools, they could submit their work for exhibition. In 1779 the work of 11-year-old Helen Beatson was to be seen along with that of Joshua Reynolds, who exhibited his portrait of Lady Caroline Howard.<sup>37</sup> Despite Samuel’s aim to celebrate the ascendancy of art and the artist, the painting does not seem to have attracted much notice

<sup>33</sup> Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay & Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Pointon, *Strategies for Showing*, p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Davies, *Catharine Macaulay & Mercy Otis Warren*, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> Delia Gaze (ed.), *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 31.

whilst on display at the Academy exhibition. The number of works exhibited had risen from 136 in 1769 to over 400 in 1779,<sup>38</sup> meaning that canvases would often be hung five rows high, with the upper paintings tilted forwards to enable them to be seen better from below. However, the version of Samuel's scene which had previously appeared as a print in Johnson's *Ladies' New and Polite Pocket Memorandum for 1778* did excite comment. When Elizabeth Montagu came face to face with her own likeness she wrote with delight to her friend and fellow *Living Muse*, Elizabeth Carter:

Pray do you know, that Mr Johnson, the editor of a most useful pocket book, has done my head the honour to putt [sic] it into a print with yours, & several other celebrated heads, & to call us the nine Muses. He also says some very handsome things, & it is charming to think how our praises will ride about the World in every bodies pocket [...] unless we could all be put into a popular ballad, set to a favourite old English tune, I do not see how we could become more universally celebrated.<sup>39</sup>

Montagu's reaction illustrates her sense of patriotic pride to be living in an age and country where it was possible for women to access knowledge and be celebrated for their literary and artistic achievements. As one anonymous critic remarked in 1785: 'at no preceding period has there ever been in England, at the same time so many female authors as at present and possessed of so much indisputable merit.'<sup>40</sup> However, Montagu had not always been so keen to be depicted as a Muse. In the 1760s Elizabeth Carter and Catharine Macaulay had been painted in the classical style by Catherine Read. Their portraits seem to have been intended to become a set of nine Muses, with Elizabeth Montagu approached to sit next, but she refused. Harriet Guest suggests Montagu's refusal shows that she did not want to detract attention from Carter's talent and preferred to think of herself as 'a wealthy patron rather than a living

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<sup>38</sup> Gaze, *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists*, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Letter to Elizabeth Carter, 24 November 1777, Montagu Correspondence, Huntington Library, MO3435, quoted in *Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Anon, *Dialogues Concerning the Ladies to Which is Added an Essay on the Antient Amazons* (London: T. Cadell, 1785), p. 152.

muse.<sup>41</sup> However, Montagu stated that she did not wish to be depicted as one of the ‘select & sacred number nine’, as she believed there were ‘in this Land nine thousand such sort of good women as I.’<sup>42</sup> Celebrating the talent of women identified as the exceptional few effectively diminishes the achievements of the many, even if the work aims to encourage national progress through emulation.

*The Nine Living Muses* promotes Samuel’s views on the encouragement of the polite arts as the hallmark of a civilized society. As later expressed in his address to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, subsequently published as *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting* (1786): ‘they soften the manners, humanise the mind and give birth to attention and civility which are the basis of politeness and render society truly amiable and engaging’.<sup>43</sup> Samuel, in his attempt to raise the status of the arts, promotes himself as much as the women writers and artists he depicts in his work, and exhibited *The Nine Living Muses* in the hope that this painting would further his career as a portraitist and history painter following the attention received by the print.

Consistent with the process of producing a print, the order of the figures has been reversed, with Kauffman’s easel appearing at the far right-hand edge of the composition as opposed to the left. The differences do not stop here, suggesting that this print was produced by Page from an earlier version of Samuel’s painting.

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<sup>41</sup> Harriet Guest, ‘Bluestocking Feminism’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65.1/2 (2002), 59-80 (p. 72).

<sup>42</sup> Montagu, Letter to Carter, 30 June 1765, Huntington Library, Montagu Collection, MO 3146, quoted in Guest, ‘Bluestocking Feminism’, p. 70.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel, *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting*, p. 3.



Figure 1.4: Page after Richard Samuel, *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*, etching with some engraving (1777), published in Johnson's *Ladies' New and Polite Pocket Memorandum for 1778* (Wikimedia Commons).

The major difference between the print and the painting is the removal of Britannia from the composition. The statue of Britannia being crowned by Apollo, present in the print, places the emphasis firmly on British talent and Britain as the inheritor of classical ideals. Removing Britannia seemingly reduces the nationalist message to make the focus on art, but Samuel believed that the state of the arts and the state of the nation were inseparable, with the polite arts being what divides a civilized society from a nation of barbarians. Davies notes that by the 1760s 'it had become a commonplace' in the discourse of national progress to view women's 'polite achievements in an iconic or ornamental relation to national civility'.<sup>44</sup> The

<sup>44</sup> Davies, *Catharine Macaulay & Mercy Otis Warren*, p. 79.

representation of the female artist is bound to ideas of nation, thus the treatment of the artist in art and literature can be interpreted as a wider comment upon the role of women in society.

With the statue of Apollo moved back into the shadows, the re-worked composition puts more focus on the Muses themselves. However, despite the appearance of harmony, Samuel subtly privileges the visual and musical arts over literary creativity, as can be seen when comparing the 1777 print to the painting produced a year later. In the print, Charlotte Lennox more aptly holds a tablet rather than a lute, and Elizabeth Griffith is captured in the act of writing, wielding a quill which has disappeared in the painting. In the removal of the quill, Griffith effectively loses her agency. Furthermore, with no key provided to the women's real identities, the focus becomes more on the aesthetic appearance of the group as a whole rather than on the achievements of each individual woman. However, Angelica Kauffman is shown as an artist at her easel even though the iconography of painting does not align her with a particular Muse. She looks on, surveying all before her in order to capture the scene and produce a tangible artefact. She emerges from what can be seen as a generalized depiction of female creativity to be celebrated as a female artist. Her work can preserve and promote the image of the creative woman as Muse to encourage emulation and the spread of improvement.

To return to Samuel's *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting*, published as a pamphlet after being presented to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, this text extols the importance of drawing and painting as a universal language which can communicate more than words. What's more, the close observation required to produce a drawing enables the artist to see more clearly and thus understand the world with greater insight: 'In learning to draw we learn to see'.<sup>45</sup> Samuel goes on to quote the following lines from William Hayley's 'An Essay on Painting' (1781) as a means of

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel, *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting*, p. 15.

developing his argument from the utility of drawing to the artist, to the benefits for the beholder of art:

Blest be the pencil, which from death can save  
 The semblance of the virtuous wife, and brave;  
 That youth and emulation still may gaze,  
 On those inspiring forms of ancient days,  
 And from the force of bright example bold,  
 Rival their worth, “and be what they behold.”<sup>46</sup>

Drawing and painting have the power to promote moral improvement by preserving the image of worthy personages. For Samuel, and Hayley, the act of gazing is a transformative experience which inspires the viewer to ‘be what they behold’ through emulation.

The idea of emulation is intrinsic to the genre of the conversation piece. As noted by Peter de Bolla, following the sight-lines within a conversation piece creates a ‘narrativizing movement’ whereby ‘the image gives the viewer the sensation of being included within the plane of representation, within the conversation’.<sup>47</sup> Its very structure, therefore, encourages emulation in the beholder. The conversation piece was a popular genre of group portraiture to emerge during the eighteenth century, loosely defined by the National Gallery by stating that: ‘Works of this sort are usually small in scale and depict, relatively informally, a group of family members or friends.’<sup>48</sup> Jon Mee’s work on conversation in the eighteenth century positions the conversation piece in relation to the supposedly egalitarian nature of coffee shop exchanges, noting that such relaxed informality is inevitably governed by rules one should

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<sup>46</sup> William Hayley, *An Essay on Painting: in two epistles to Mr. Romney*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: printed for J. Dodsley, 1781), quoted in Richard Samuel, *Remarks on the Utility of Drawing and Painting* (London: Thomas Wilkins, 1786), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> National Gallery, ‘Glossary: Conversation Piece’ [n.d.], [online]: <<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/conversation-piece>> [accessed 08/09/17].

follow in order to get on in life.<sup>49</sup> Whilst the informal arrangement of the conversation piece is designed to make the spectator feel as though they are welcomed into a social gathering, it is ultimately a construct staged to present an idealized image of the private self to a public audience.

Each of the women depicted, with the exception of Montagu, relied upon the arts for their primary source of income, but Samuel glosses over the difficulties women faced in securing an independent living. Samuel's painting is a highly idealized, imagined meeting of talented women, not only in terms of their appearance, but their opportunities to train, exhibit, publish, and perform. Elizabeth Linley stopped performing after her marriage to the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan as her husband believed it would reflect badly upon him, challenging his status as a gentleman, if he were to allow his wife to pursue her career. Despite Angelica Kauffman being a founder member of the Royal Academy of Art, women were not admitted as students of the Academy schools until 1860. Although Charlotte Grant argues that the prizes awarded by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce complicate the view of women being excluded,<sup>50</sup> women could not attend life-drawing classes, and could still be accused of displaying too much knowledge of male anatomy even when painting modestly draped figures.

In Richard Polwhele's poem 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798), he includes the names of two artists amongst his 'unsex'd' writers: 'While classic KAUFFMAN her Priapus drew,| And linger'd a sweet blush with EMMA CREWE.'<sup>51</sup> Diana Beauclerk, the only other artist cited by Polwhele, escapes the scandal of her divorce to be listed amongst the virtuous

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<sup>49</sup> Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Charlotte Grant, 'The choice of Hercules: The Polite arts and 'female excellence' in eighteenth-century London', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 75-103 (p. 92).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females; A poem, addressed to the author of The Pursuits of Literature* (New York: Re-printed by Wm. Cobbett, 1800), p.26.

examples provided by three of Samuel's *Living Muses*: Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Hannah More. Whilst the women's sex lives are a problem for Polwhele, his divide is mainly drawn along political lines. Kauffman and Crewe are grouped with radical writers, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Mary Robinson, owing to their unsuitable artwork. Crewe was a skilled amateur artist who, along with Diana Beauclerk and Elizabeth Templetown, produced designs for Wedgwood jasperware. However, it was Crewe's frontispiece for Erasmus Darwin's poem 'The Loves of the Plants' (1789) that aroused Polwhele's distaste. In his opinion, Botany is an unsuitable subject for women to study due to the emphasis on reproduction, and Crewe's anthropomorphized image of Flora at play with Cupid went too far: 'she has rather overstepped the modesty of nature, by giving the portrait an air of voluptuousness too luxuriously melting'.<sup>52</sup> Kauffman, meanwhile, is accused of painting Priapus, the fertility god recognised by his permanent erection. The contrast between viewing Kauffman as a *Living Muse* or an *Unsex'd Female* shows how women artists could just as easily invite praise as censure.

The potential for the arts to provide an income for women was both a blessing and a curse; music, painting, or writing could be a means of securing financial independence, but the acceptance of money could devalue a woman's status in society. Mary Brunton articulated the problem faced by literary women in no uncertain terms: 'To be pointed at – to be noticed & commented upon - To be suspected of literary airs – to be shunned, as literary women are, by the more unpretending of my own sex: & abhorred, as literary women are, by the more pretending of the other! – My dear, I would sooner exhibit as a rope dancer.'<sup>53</sup> Gary Kelly, in his Introduction to the Broadview edition of *Millenium Hall*, notes that: 'a woman who published, even in the minor discourses and genres conventionally permitted to women,

<sup>52</sup> Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females*, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Brunton, Letter to Eliza Izett, 30 August, 1810, quoted by Alexander Brunton in the *Memoir* prefixed to Mary Brunton, *Emmeline; With Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller; Archibald Constable and Co.; London: John Murray, 1819), p. xxxvi.

risked forfeiting her ‘naturally’ private, domestic character.’ Furthermore: ‘By publishing, or making her work public, she also risked becoming a ‘public’ or commodified woman, other varieties of which were the prostitute and the actress.’<sup>54</sup> Sarah Scott published her novel *Millenium Hall* anonymously, although her work was discussed as an open secret amongst the Bluestocking circle.

As the sister of Elizabeth Montagu, Scott was part of the Bluestocking epistolary network, if not a constant presence at their gatherings. Betty Schellenberg has suggested that the ‘fragmentation’ of Scott’s work as a novelist and biographer means that ‘Mrs. Scott the author, even when named, never gains coherence as an author-function of print culture, let alone as a historian or intellectual.’<sup>55</sup> To illustrate Scott’s lack of literary identity, Schellenberg cites the poem ‘The Female Advocate’ (1774) as an example for its failure to name Scott as a muse alongside Montagu and Macaulay, as duly noted in a review published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.<sup>56</sup> Even if Scott was not readily associated with the Bluestockings, or the *Living Muses of Great Britain*, Eve Tavor Bannet has answered claims that her dislike of large assemblies automatically excluded her from the inner circle by noting how the close connection between the sisters remained unbroken throughout the course of their lives. Bannet’s study of the Montagu correspondence shows that ‘they knew the same people, collaborated in the same philanthropic activities, shared reading matter, political positions, and a secretary’.<sup>57</sup> With Scott sharing in her sister’s philanthropic projects and views on female education, *Millenium Hall* can be read as a manifesto for Bluestocking

<sup>54</sup> Gary Kelly, ‘Introduction’ to *Millenium Hall* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate; A poem occasioned by reading Mr. Duncombe’s Feminead* (London, Printed for Joseph Johnson, 1774). Review: Anon, ‘41. The Female Advocate’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine, and Historical Chronical*, Vol. 44: August 1774 (London: Printed for D. Henry, 1774), pp. 375-77: ‘we shall only add, that, if Miss Scott had recollected, she without doubt would also have introduced, a namesake of her own, and the sister of Mrs. Montagu (Mrs. Scott), the author of *Millennium Hall* [sic], the *History of Sir George Ellison*, and the *Life of Theodore Agrippa d’Aubignè*.’ (p. 376).

<sup>57</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet, ‘The Bluestocking Sisters: Women’s Patronage, *Millenium Hall*, and “The Visible Providence of a Country”’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 30.1 (Winter 2006), 25-55 (p.25).

ideals. With four editions published between 1762 and 1778, the novel promoted how women could live independently of men by displaying their capacity to run an estate, with their skills going beyond domestic duties to include everything from the arts to accounting.

Prior to writing *Millenium Hall*, Scott had dealt with the issue of gender and labour in her novels *The History of Cornelia* (1750) and *A Journey Through Every Stage in Life* (1754). As Jennie Batchelor describes these early works as a ‘testing ground’ for Scott’s ideas on women’s work,<sup>58</sup> it is worth addressing how she presents the woman artist in ‘The History of Leonora and Louisa’, a tale embedded in *A Journey Through Every Stage in Life*, before turning to *Millenium Hall*. *A Journey* is comprised of a series of inset stories narrated by the servant Sabrina to her mistress, the Princess Carinthia who has been imprisoned by her brother to prevent her from taking the Crown. Whilst the stories Sabrina tells illustrate the oppressive influence of patriarchal structures beyond the castle walls, ‘The History of Leonora and Louisa’ serves to exemplify how a woman might challenge the restrictions faced.

Leonora is an exceptionally well-educated young woman, whose talents combine ‘male and female accomplishments’.<sup>59</sup> However, when her step-mother confines her activity to plain work, as ‘the only proper business of her sex’,<sup>60</sup> and tries to marry her off to a repugnant older man, Leonora decides to flee with her cousin, Louisa. In order for the pair to pass unnoticed as they attempt to make their own way in the world, Leonora adopts the guise of a clergyman travelling with his sister. Over the course of the tale, Leonora succeeds working as a clergyman, a portrait painter, and a tutor, with cross-dressing providing the

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<sup>58</sup> Jennie Batchelor, ‘The ‘Gift’ Of Work: Labour, Narrative And Community In The Novels Of Sarah Scott’, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 29-66 (p. 31).

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Scott, ‘The History of Leonora and Louisa’, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, Vol 1 of 2 (London: printed for A. Millar in the Strand), pp. 7-162 (p. 10).

<sup>60</sup> Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, p. 14

means for her to be able to ply her skills and secure an independent living. In her endeavour ‘to conquer the Disadvantages our Sex labour under’, Leonora ‘proved that Custom, not Nature, inflicts that Dependence in which we live, obliged to the Industry of Man for our Support, as well as to his Courage for our Defence’.<sup>61</sup> Scott dismantles the gender binary by showing that a woman has the capability to enter the male world of work and remain virtuous, forcing society to challenge artificial gender distinctions.

Whilst working as a portrait painter, Leonora exploits her position for the greater good by seeking to reform her sitters: ‘As a painter she thought it her Duty to flatter with her Tongue as well as with her Pencil.’<sup>62</sup> Her artistic practice, combining visual and verbal flattery, has an improving influence which shows that women are not only capable, but also bring a powerfully productive virtue to their work. As Batchelor attests: ‘Leonora is never masculinized by her work, her success in which, as we have seen, is crucially dependent upon the feminine qualities she brings to it.’<sup>63</sup> The combination of what are socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity provides a model to drive reform, suggesting that society should not only accept, but facilitate women’s work.

Caroline Gonda argues that although Leonora’s cross-dressing is presented as a necessity of circumstance, it should not be overlooked that it is also a means of addressing same-sex love/desire.<sup>64</sup> Whilst Leonora’s adventures may end with a conventionally happy marriage, Sabrina quickly cuts off her story at this point:

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<sup>61</sup> Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, p. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Caroline Gonda, ‘The Odd Women: Charlotte Charke, Sarah Scott and the Metamorphoses of Sex’, in *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 111-26.

And here, with your Highness's Permission, I shall drop her; a Novel would make but a bad Figure carried on beyond Marriage; and as I began *Leonora's* History in order to shew, by an uncommon Example, how capable our Sex might be made of preserving Independence, I could have no Excuse for continuing it after she had done so common a Thing as marrying, and made herself dependent on one of the other Sex; she might rather serve as an Argument, that, let our Talents be equal or superior to them, our Spirits above Meanness, and our Situations above Controul, still sooner or later we become their Dependents, perhaps their Slaves.<sup>65</sup>

Despite preaching the message that women can live independently outside of marriage, Leonora's story ends somewhat conventionally with a happy, heterosexual love-match that effectively puts an end to her working life. However, in its presentation of a utopian female community, *Millenium Hall* presents an alternative as Scott continues to write to reform society.

The opening to Scott's *Millenium Hall* recalls Samuel's *Nine Living Muses* of Great Britain in the presentation of an idealized female community of artists, writers, and musicians. However, where Samuel reimagines Raphael's *Parnassus* as a female utopia, Scott presents her women artists as scholars, as opposed to Muses, through the inclusion of an all-female tableau vivant of Raphael's *The School of Athens*. Furthermore, Scott juxtaposes the real and the ideal through a series of inset narratives which serve to illustrate the difficulties these women faced prior to finding solace in the female utopia of Millenium Hall.

### **Millenium Hall as a Women's 'Attick School'**

Located in rural Cornwall, the secluded manor is not marked on any maps of the region, and is bounded on all sides by topographic features, including forest, river and sea borders. A gentleman, later identified by name in the title of Scott's sequel, *The History of Sir George*

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<sup>65</sup> Scott, *A Journey Through Every Stage of Life*, pp. 159-60.

*Ellison* (1766), only stumbles across the house he names Millenium Hall following a carriage accident.<sup>66</sup> The novel takes the form of a letter Ellison writes to a London bookseller in which he seeks to describe the utopia he finds and encourage further reform by taking Millenium Hall as a model to be emulated.

Ellison has been travelling to the West Country for the benefit of his health after returning from his plantation in Jamaica. When their chaise crashes, curiosity leads him and his young companion, Mr Lamont, to explore the country. Reading the landscape, an avenue of trees tells them they must be near a house, and they continue on to seek shelter from an approaching storm. The two men are duly welcomed inside by Mrs Maynard, who turns out to be Ellison's cousin, and he proceeds to describe the scene he finds:

At the lower end of the room was a lady painting, with exquisite art indeed, a beautiful Madona [sic]; near her another, drawing a landscape out of her own imagination; a third, carving a picture-frame in wood, in the finest manner; a fourth, engraving; and a young girl reading aloud to them; the distance from the ladies in the bow-window being such, that they could receive no disturbance from her. At the next window were placed a group of girls, from the age of ten years old to fourteen. Of these, one was drawing figures, another a landscape. A third a perspective view, a fourth engraving, a fifth carving, a sixth turning in wood, a seventh writing, an eighth cutting out linen, another making a gown, and by them an empty chair and a tent, with embroidery, finely fancied, before it, which we afterwards found had been left by a young girl who was gone to practise on the harpsichord.<sup>67</sup>

As with Samuel's *Nine Living Muses*, this is a group portrait drawn by a male outsider. For Caroline Gonda, this male framing constitutes an 'act of literary transvestism' which 'allows Scott to frame Millenium Hall's stories of women's lives through an authoritative, approving

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<sup>66</sup> The name 'Millenium Hall' refers to Millennialism, or the Christian belief in a thousand year period of 'heaven on earth' prior to the final judgement. Given that Millennialism is also associated with the Commonwealth (with commonwealthmen viewing the period after the civil war as a virtuous state of society, akin to Republican Rome), Gary Kelly believes that *Millenium Hall* 'can be read as a feminized and feminist version of the commonwealth and classical republican tradition', reforming courtly patriarchy. See Gary Kelly 'Introduction' to *Millenium Hall* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2001), p.37. However, for Kelly the fact that Ellison gives the estate its nickname is problematic: 'To name is to define and valorize, and the name suggests a utopian vision rather than a reality.' See Kelly, 'Introduction', p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Scott, *Millenium Hall*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2001), p. 59.

male gaze, and protects the novel's all-female utopian community from any possible accusations of separatism or man-hating'.<sup>68</sup> However, the scene is interpreted through a male gaze that Scott has to work to reform.<sup>69</sup>

Ellison describes nine girls each of whom is engaged in a different artistic occupation. Each woman at Millenium Hall works according to her own skill and inclination. This is a place where artistic talent and creativity are cultivated. The women and girls are not forced to follow patterns, drawing manuals, or authoritarian instructresses. They are described as having the freedom to draw from imagination, and can leave to pursue another activity whenever they should choose. The artistic occupations range from the traditional female accomplishments of music, drawing, and embroidery to more craft-based skills, such as engraving and carving. Nanette Morton notes the importance of the fact that Scott 'does not entirely disdain the acquisition of accomplishments.'<sup>70</sup> Between them the women are able to manufacture whatever they need to furnish the house and dress themselves, but necessity is not the sole motivation; the value of accomplishments in terms of entertainment and sociability is not forgotten. The scene Ellison describes shows the reciprocal benefit of the arts as music and poetry inspire painting and sewing. Furthermore, artistic pursuits are balanced with time for religious and philosophical contemplation.

Ellison describes what he sees as an 'Attick School', alluding to the group of philosophers led by Plato and Aristotle. Deborah Weiss notes that Scott could have had

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<sup>68</sup> Gonda, *Lesbian Dames*, p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> The Male Gaze: this term, as defined by feminist film critic, Laura Mulvey, is useful to apply to the context of *Millenium Hall* given Scott's choice to describe her female utopia from the perspective of a male narrator. In a patriarchal society the male gaze is considered the natural default position, with the female viewed as a passive, sexual object. Mulvey identifies three aspects to the male gaze in narrative cinema: i) the director/man behind the camera, ii) the male characters in the film, and iii) the cinematic audience. See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 6-18. In *Millenium Hall*, Scott demonstrates how disability and philanthropy can work to counteract the scopophilic impulse of the male gaze by replacing sexual pleasure with an appealing portrait of civic virtue. In reforming her narrator's gaze, Scott effectively works to reform society's view of women.

<sup>70</sup> Nanette Morton, "'A Most Sensible Oeconomy": From Spectacle to Surveillance in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 11.2 (January 1999), 185-204 (p.195).

Raphael's fresco, *The School of Athens*, in mind.<sup>71</sup> Painted between 1509 and 1511, Raphael's painting is one of four frescoes to adorn the Stanze di Raffaello of the Palazzi Pontifici in the Vatican. Commissioned by Pope Julius II to decorate his private library, each fresco represents a branch of knowledge, namely: philosophy, poetry, theology, and law. Raphael's depiction of philosophy, known as *The School of Athens*, features Plato and Aristotle standing at the centre of a semi-circular arrangement of 58 philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists, including Socrates, Pythagoras, Ptolemy, Euclid, Zoroaster, and Diogenes. This imaginary meeting of minds presents the group engaged in animated discussion, with reading, writing, calculation, and explanation in full-flow to illustrate how we can all learn from one another. This is an idealized view of classical antiquity from the perspective of Renaissance Humanism.



Figure 1.5: Raphael, *The School of Athens* (c. 1509-11), Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican (Wikimedia Commons).

<sup>71</sup> Deborah Weiss, 'Sarah Scott's "Attick School": Moral Philosophy, Ethical Agency, and *Millenium Hall*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.3 (Spring 2012), 459-86 (p. 460).

The scene depicted has much in common with Samuel's *Nine Living Muses* in terms of the semi-circular composition and the presence of a statue of Apollo, as well as the fact that it is not clear who all of the figures present are supposed to represent. However, for the classical art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, the names do not matter as the painting is more about conveying a physical and spiritual state.<sup>72</sup> Architectural continuation from the Vatican to the Classical setting of the fresco invites the spectator in to discover how a past way of thinking can inform the present.

It is telling that Scott finds inspiration in this particular fresco as opposed to that of the Muses of Parnassus which adorns the same room. The emphasis here is on real people famed for their talents, as opposed to aesthetically appealing Muses inspiring others. Scott reimagines *The School of Athens* as a space for women's education and artistic creativity, with this image providing a key point of reference to enable Ellison to understand his surroundings. Weiss describes how Ellison interprets Millenium Hall as a 'philosophical realm', noting: 'the narrator finds himself in a space that he can only comprehend by making an imaginative connection to Plato's Athenian Academy.'<sup>73</sup> Ellison's journey through the Cornish landscape has already been constructed as a movement back in time through the comparison made to the Arcadian idyll of pastoral poetry so that 'we began to think ourselves in the days of Theocritus'.<sup>74</sup> Viewing Millenium Hall in classical terms facilitates the understanding of intellectual women, and the classical past is mapped onto a corner of eighteenth-century England to enable Ellison to make sense of what he finds.

Although the influence of classical antiquity can be seen in the landscape and the mode of education adopted, Crystal B. Lake suggests that *Millenium Hall* is an antiquarian

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<sup>72</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Phaidon, 1953), p. 88.

<sup>73</sup> Weiss, 'Sarah Scott's "Attick School"', p. 460.

<sup>74</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 56.

text concerned with the preservation of ancient Britain. Not only does the full title, *A Description of Millenium Hall, and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants*, echo those of antiquarian publications of the period, but Lake argues that Scott finds ‘admiration of a local Saxon past an opportunity to use women’s genealogical, domestic, and artistic sensibilities as a means to establish women, not men, as the living inheritors of the virtues of Britain’s ancient ages.’<sup>75</sup> Rosemary Sweet’s research into eighteenth-century antiquarianism shows that women could take an active interest in national history without having to travel far to see the ruined abbeys and ancient barrows that litter the landscape.<sup>76</sup> Millenium Hall itself is a building described by Ellison as an ‘ancient structure’ of some magnificence.<sup>77</sup> For Lake, the antiquarian acts of restoration and preservation undertaken by the women have mutual benefit: ‘As the women of *Millenium Hall* undertake an antiquarian restoration and preservation of Britain’s ancient buildings and grounds, they also restore and preserve themselves.’<sup>78</sup> These women have been forgotten or mistreated by society, but become symbols of British virtue as caretakers of history who can teach the next generation. As a metonym for society as a whole, the restoration of this once neglected country estate appeals for the improvement of the nation.

The choice to set the novel in Cornwall is itself significant given this county’s peripheral location and distinct cultural heritage. Although not a separate country or principality in terms of the Act of Union (1707), Cornwall’s cultural identity, with its own folklore, language, and flag, has seen scholars including Dafydd Moore call for the region to

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<sup>75</sup> Crystal B. Lake, ‘Redecorating the Ruin: Women and Antiquarianism in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*’, *ELH*, 76.3 (Fall 2009), 661-86 (pp. 662-63).

<sup>76</sup> Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 58.

<sup>78</sup> Lake, ‘Redecorating the Ruin’, p. 663.

be considered as part of the four nations approach to the ‘devolution’ of British literature.<sup>79</sup> It is telling that the disenfranchised women of *Millenium Hall* find a home on the geographical margins of society, and claim this space as their own to reform. In some respects Cornwall can be considered as an outlying land tied to the Celtic barbarians of Britain’s past. However, eighteenth-century Cornwall was also a place of innovation and industry that saw the county at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution. The rugged landscape and rich deposits of natural resources has appealed to generations of artists and craftspeople, whilst the sea coast opens up the West Country to the New World. The ‘otherness’ and seclusion may appeal to the women of *Millenium Hall*, but there is potential for progress to be made. For Alessa Johns, the locality and realism of such a setting demonstrates possibility and accessibility: ‘women’s familiar terrain, physically and mentally accessible to average readers, demonstrated the extent to which women writers were determined to embed their stories in the political and social environment, to contribute to contemporary debate.’<sup>80</sup> The Cornish country estate is a markedly different approach to a utopia from the fantastic journey to another planet presented in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* (1666), for example.<sup>81</sup> However, whilst the setting of *Millenium Hall* is familiar, there is an appeal to the past. Judith Broome has described *Millenium Hall* as backward-looking in its nostalgic adaptation of Mary Astell’s earlier model of education,<sup>82</sup> but the novel looks back in order to move forward, with the mapping of classical ideals onto the Cornish landscape reflecting the centre-periphery model of the spread of influence described in Malcolm Chapman’s

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<sup>79</sup> Dafydd Moore, ‘Devolving Romanticism: Nation, Region and the Case of Devon and Cornwall’, *Literature Compass*, 5.5 (2008), 949-63.

<sup>80</sup> Alessa Johns, *Women’s Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Cavendish’s *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World* (1666), is a work of proto-science fiction describing how a woman travels into another realm and becomes the leader of an utopian society, ruling over groups of anthropomorphized animal-men, each species of which work according to their specific skill or talent. See Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World & Other Writings*, ed. by Kate Lilley (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> Judith Broome, *Fictive Domains: Body, Landscape, Nostalgia, 1717-1770* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), p. 142.

anthropological study of the Celts.<sup>83</sup> In the absence of maternal influence, the women rely upon providing an education based on classical emulation.

Scott gives context to the tableau vivant of the Attick School by providing a series of sentimental inset narratives. Here it does matter who each woman is, and what circumstances have led her to seek solace at Millenium Hall. Louisa Mancel, for example, is a heroine of uncertain origins whose beauty encourages a stranger to take her into his care on the death of her aunt. Mr Hintman duly sends his new ward to be educated at a French boarding school as a means of grooming her into his ideal mistress. When he dies without making a will, she is left with only her accomplishments to support herself:

she endeavoured, by taking in plain-work, to provide for some part of her current expences, the less to diminish the little fund she had by her. She likewise employed part of her time in painting, having reason to hope, that if she could find a means of offering her pictures to sale, she might from them raise a very convenient sum.<sup>84</sup>

Other stories follow a similar plotline, whereby deaths, debts, remarriage, illegitimacy, or primogeniture, result in a lack of provision for female family members. Miss Mancel's story is one of recovered origins, when she is providentially reunited with her mother and subsequently inherits her fortune. It is only then that she can afford to buy a property and invite others to pool their resources and live as a community. Each inset narrative describes the history of a woman who has lost her mother either through death or separation. The formation of a female community offers the guidance ordinarily provided by maternal imitation, allowing the women to learn from one another. Scott highlights the failings in society which have led these women to retreat from the outside world, and stresses the importance of providing an education for women so that they can go on to provide for themselves.

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<sup>83</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, pp. 105-06

### Reforming the Male Gaze: Beauty, Deformity, and Philanthropy

Following the breakdown of Scott's own marriage, she and her friend, Lady Barbara Montagu, set up home at Bath Easton, where they themselves provided a religious education for twelve boys and twelve girls. In a letter Elizabeth Montagu sent to Gilbert West in October 1775, she describes the place as 'their convent, for by its regularity it resembles one'.<sup>85</sup> Bannet notes that Montagu's light-hearted comment detracts from the fact that it was a place known for the lively conversation amongst the constant flow of visitors, but the term convent alludes to the educative scheme. Although Bannet argues that viewing Scott's Bath Easton project as a kind of convent has 'stimulated readings of *Millenium Hall* (1762) that place it in a tradition of schemes for Protestant nunneries for superfluous spinsters going back to Mary Astell',<sup>86</sup> in many ways *Millenium Hall* is a working model of the convent-style educational institution recommended for women by Astell in *A Serious Proposal* (1694-7):

Here will be no impertinent Visits, no foolish Amours, no idle Amusements to distract our Thoughts and waste our precious time; a very little of which is spent in Dressing, that grand devourer and its concomitants, and no more than necessity requires in sleep and eating; so that here's a vast Treasure gain'd, which for aught I know may purchase an happy Eternity.<sup>87</sup>

Astell believed that a cloistered environment, outside of patriarchal society, would protect women from the evils of vanity and seduction and promote piety and charity. A retired situation is intended to improve the mind and soul by removing the materialistic fascination with external objects, and freeing the women to reflect on philosophy and religion: 'They have nothing to do but to glorifie GOD, and, to benefit their Neighbours, and she who does not thus improve her Talent, is more vile and despicable than the meanest Creature that

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<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Letter to Gilbert West, 16 October 1775, in *Elizabeth Montagu, Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence 1720-1761*, ed. by Emily J. Climençon, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 79.

<sup>86</sup> Bannet, 'The Bluestocking Sisters', p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest. In two parts. By a lover of her sex* (London: printed for Richard Wilkin, 1697), p. 64.

attends her'.<sup>88</sup> Similarly at Millenium Hall, the women use their God-given talents for the benefit of all. They are not bound to stay by sacred vows, but would be free to marry if so inclined. However, Susan Staves notices a difference in that Astell's curriculum 'aims at a higher level of philosophical thought, whereas Scott's women, in keeping with the greater interest in the aesthetic in this period, have more interest in cultivating the arts'.<sup>89</sup> Whilst Scott describes a diverse curriculum, balancing the arts with languages, religion, philosophy, estate management, housekeeping, accounting, and gardening, the arts were coming to be seen as a way out of adversity for women. Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798) suggests that 'women whose refinement of manners unfit them for any occupation of a sordid menial kind'<sup>90</sup> could turn to a feminine art, such as painting, to support themselves and argues against the degradation of 'the female who engages in the concerns of commerce'.<sup>91</sup> In providing meaningful work as well as a home for women, Millenium Hall promotes a model for the reform of gentry capitalism to incorporate the disenfranchised.

The economy of Millenium Hall is based on mutual exchange, and that extends beyond the manor house to the cottagers who live on the estate, many of whom are disfigured or disabled: 'Now there is neighbour Susan, and neighbour Rachel; Susan is lame, so she spins cloaths [sic] for Rachel; and Rachel cleans Susan's house, and does such things for her as she cannot do for herself'.<sup>92</sup> This model also applies to the arts, with the blind still able to participate in musical entertainments. The philanthropic initiatives at Millenium Hall mirror those Scott supported in real life to the extent that Bannet suggests: 'we might conceive of

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<sup>88</sup> Astell, *A Serious Proposal*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>89</sup> Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 352.

<sup>90</sup> Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, 1817), p. 97.

<sup>91</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>92</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 66.

Millenium Hall as an amalgam and imaginative extension of the sisters' various philanthropies'.<sup>93</sup> One such project was a shop in Bath selling fashionable goods and fancy work, such as embroidered collars, manufactured by the handicapped or impoverished women Scott wanted to help. However, the financial support required to sustain such schemes was a constant issue. Betty Rizzo has described how Scott's writing and philanthropic activities can be seen as reciprocal endeavours. With publishing used as a means to disseminate ideas and fund worthy causes, 'The reputation of Scott's writing in her own time was inextricable from her own reputation for piety and good works.'<sup>94</sup> Publishing could help promote her ideas on women's work and education to a wider audience and encourage societal reform.

Scott's enthusiasm for the self-sufficiency provided by artisan crafts can be seen in the rug factory set-up by the women of Millenium Hall to support the poor:

Here we found several hundreds of people of all ages, from six years old to four-score, employed in the various parts of the manufacture, some spinning, some weaving, others dying the worsted, and in short all busy, singing and whistling, with the appearance of general chearfulness [sic], and their neat dress shewed them in a condition of proper plenty.<sup>95</sup>

In showing how the poor can be helped to help themselves, Scott reforms the system of patronage into an altruistic act of benevolence. Elaine Challus notes that motives of 'self-interest, duty, necessity, greed and social or political aspirations' were more usually associated with patronage,<sup>96</sup> but in *Millenium Hall* philanthropy is placed above personal gain. Dorice Williams Elliott argues that in *Millenium Hall* Scott uses philanthropy to show

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<sup>93</sup> Bannet, 'The Bluestocking Sisters', p.38.

<sup>94</sup> Betty Rizzo, 'Introduction' to *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. by Betty Rizzo (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), pp. ix-xlii (p. xxx).

<sup>95</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 243.

<sup>96</sup> Elaine Challus, 'To Serve My Friends: Women and Political Patronage in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, ed. by Amanda Vickery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 57-88 (p. 71).

how women can be productive members of society without being a wife or mother. Elliott believes that defining a single woman as a philanthropist, rather than as a 'spinster' or an 'old maid', provides her with a desexualized identity that does not depend on her relationship to a man: 'she strips philanthropy of its specifically masculine component and makes it hospitable to nonsexualized women.'<sup>97</sup> Despite the centrality of art to the philanthropic projects of *Millenium Hall*, the women are not defined as artists. Rather, their diverse range of occupations works to resist categorization. What is important is that the women have a non-sexual role in a self-sufficient community. Broome proposes that with 'the women's bodies mapped as sexless', reproduction is limited to cultivation of the land.<sup>98</sup> Whilst the Arcadian landscape may be fertile, the arts also provide an alternative avenue of (re)production.

The women of Millenium Hall are not fallen women; they are women of unblemished reputation, many of whom have providentially escaped attempts on their virtue. Elliott suggests the programme of education initiated at the Hall is specifically designed to protect young orphaned daughters of the poor from seduction. Equipping the girls with the skills they need to support themselves as governesses or housekeepers is 'not meant to demean the young women but rather to keep them from aspiring to use their superior education to catch a rich husband'.<sup>99</sup> However, in the scheme of creating independent women, the useful arts, such as drawing, textiles, and languages, overlap with the polite accomplishments previously taught to Miss Mancel to make her a desirable mistress. The negative view of accomplishments, whereby artistic talent is only cultivated in women to enable them to snare a rich husband, is to be addressed further in the next chapter, but the problem with women's art being purchased as a benevolent act is the potential for its status and value as art to diminish. When the focus is on charity and sympathy rather than genius or skill, especially if

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<sup>97</sup> Dorice Williams Elliott, 'Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 35. 3: Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer 1995), 535-53 (p. 537).

<sup>98</sup> Broome, *Fictive Domains*, p. 149.

<sup>99</sup> Elliott, 'Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy', p. 546.

patrons are drawn to the aid of a beauty in distress,<sup>100</sup> there is a risk that the gaze remains fixed on the artist rather than what is produced. Developing Elliott's definition of the desexualized woman, the residents of Millenium Hall are 'de-aestheticized'. The emphasis placed on plain dress arises from the inherent danger of beauty, which becomes an undesirable trait when women are subject to unwanted attention. As stated by Felicity Nussbaum: 'Defining beauty as a handicap and ugliness and deformity as agreeable, the women of Millenium Hall, like their doomed charges, are able to escape the sexual economy and its tropes.'<sup>101</sup> In *Millenium Hall*, Scott effectively uses disability as a means to reform the male gaze.

On his arrival at Millenium Hall, Ellison is not only drawn to take notice of the various artistic and intellectual activities the women and girls are engaged in, but goes on to describe their physical attributes, particularly where beauty has faded.<sup>102</sup> Unlike Samuel's picture of generalized beauty, Scott presents a group of women varied in their physical appearances and abilities. Many are past the bloom of youth, and Mrs Trentham has been left scarred by Smallpox, as Scott herself was after contracting the disease in 1741. Almost a decade before writing of a utopian community where deformity is advantageous to securing a place, Scott had translated Pierre de la Place's *La Laideur Aimable; ou les Dangers de la Beauté* (1752) as *Agreeable Ugliness* (1754). This is a novel which contrasts the fate of a beautiful yet vain girl who falls from grace as a dissolute flirt, with that of her plain but virtuous sister. Scott continues to deconstruct beauty as a signifier of virtue in Millenium Hall.

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<sup>100</sup> See R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974), for a consideration of the literary appeal of a beautiful woman in difficulty.

<sup>101</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, 'The Pleasures of "Deformity" in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England', in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 161-73 (p. 166).

<sup>102</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 60.

The community of Millenium Hall does not merely shelter women whose looks have faded: the housekeeper only has one hand, the musicians are blind, and people who are described as ‘giants’ and ‘dwarves’ are welcomed to work on the estate. Seeing the disabled and deformed happily engaged in their work helps to dismantle Ellison’s association of beauty with virtue:

Instead of feeling the pain one might naturally receive from seeing the human form so disgraced, we were filled with admiration of the human mind, when so nobly exalted by virtue, as it is in the patronesses of these poor creatures, who wore an air of chearfulness [sic].<sup>103</sup>

The so-called ‘monsters’ of Millenium Hall are protected from the gaze of the world whilst gaining a sense of self-worth and community spirit from their work. Although ‘culture’s devaluation of deformity is reversed’, for Nussbaum there remains an evident ‘hierarchy of oppressions’,<sup>104</sup> that sees the higher class women govern those less fortunate.

Scott continues to chart the reformation of the male gaze, as Ellison moves from evaluating the aesthetic appeal of the women at work to looking at how he could emulate their community on his own estate: ‘If what I have described, may tempt any one to go and do likewise, I shall think myself fortunate in communicating it. For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale.’<sup>105</sup> In spite of the structural inequalities, Millenium Hall functions as a Platonic ideal form, whereby the utopia provides a model we should strive to emulate.

As a philosophical novel, Weiss states, the text teaches the reader that ‘the separation of rational response from emotional reaction is productive of ethical action’.<sup>106</sup> Scott’s aim to ‘excite in the READER proper sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to a Love of

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<sup>103</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 74.

<sup>104</sup> Nussbaum, ‘The Pleasures of “Deformity”’, p. 168.

<sup>105</sup> Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 249.

<sup>106</sup> Weiss, ‘Sarah Scott’s “Attick School”’, p. 1.

Virtue' as stated within the extended title, emphasizes her hopes that the text would have a positive effect on the readership. *Millenium Hall* is not a frivolous or scandalous novel. As Elizabeth Montagu reassured her sister: 'A novel written so as to excite good actions, is a very usefull [sic] and consequently a very respectable work [...] If people will not read sermons let them receive doctrine in the form of a novel, it all answers the same purpose.'<sup>107</sup> Scott's decision to publish anonymously meant that *Millenium Hall* was mistaken for the work of a male author, but *The Critical Review* still found little to praise in the work: 'His characters are monsters of excellence; his scene absurdly unnatural; his narrative perfectly cold and tasteless; his precepts trite; and his very title unmeaningly and ridiculously pedantic.'<sup>108</sup> The reviewer evidently finds Scott's novel far too idealized for the moral message to excite good actions. Placing the sentimental stories within a frame narrative does create distance, which enables Ellison and by extension, the reader, to avoid making judgments based on emotion over reason. However, this also means that the information is always filtered through Ellison; the reader never gets to hear the women's stories in their own words. This is problematic given that Nicole Pohl believes that 'Sir George Ellison clearly misinterprets Millenium Hall's symbolic meaning in accordance to his own frame of mind'. Giving an account 'filtered through voyeuristic paternalism', Ellison's account 'echoes the contemporary economic iconography of women as civilizing and feminizing influence on capitalist commerce.' What he does not understand is that these women are seeking to live in a manner which disrupts the common held assumptions that women need men or their approval.<sup>109</sup> As an isolated community, they do not, or cannot, transmit their own message. It

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<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Letter to Sarah Scott, 26/27 October 1765, Montagu Collection, The Huntington Library, MO 5830, quoted in Eve Tavor Bannet, 'The Bluestocking Sisters: Women's Patronage, *Millenium Hall*, and "The Visible Providence of a Country"', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 30.1 (Winter 2006), 25-55 (p. 43).

<sup>108</sup> Anon. 'Art. X. A Description of Millenium Hall', *The Critical Review*, ed. by Tobias George Smollett, December 1762 (London: R. Baldwin, 1762), pp. 463-64 (p.463).

<sup>109</sup> Nicole Pohl, 'The Country House as Utopia', *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 53-94 (p. 76).

takes the accidental arrival of man to show how replication of their model could lead to national improvement.

Scott went on to publish a sequel to *Millenium Hall* to illustrate the process of reform through imitation. In *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) the influence of the Millenium Hall system can be seen spreading to the neighbouring county of Devonshire, following Ellison's decision to follow the philanthropic model he had admired on his visit. However, this model remains dependent on upholding rigid class structures.

### **Class in *The History of Sir George Ellison***

In the sequel to *Millenium Hall*, Ellison is asked to look over Mrs. Morgan's plans to reform female education and offer his opinion. Hers is a three-tier approach, tailored to befit a girl's station in life. The class distinctions proposed particularly impose limitations on the provision of education in the arts.

The first group, comprised of girls from families of rank and distinction, are to be taught polite accomplishments 'proper for young women of fashion':<sup>110</sup> music, drawing, arithmetic, science, languages, history, geography, and natural philosophy are all recommended to prevent them from falling into idleness or dissipation and promote the domestic happiness of a daughter, wife, or mother. The second group of girls, those with no considerable fortune, who can only expect to marry a gentleman with a small estate, or a good profession in the army or clergy, are to be taught a more humble selection of skills based on 'housewifery'. This includes economy, writing, and arithmetic, alongside cooking, sewing, and mending. Drawing is forbidden unless genius would render this skill

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<sup>110</sup> Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. by Betty Rizzo (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 94.

profitable,<sup>111</sup> whilst music is not recommended in case it should draw her into higher company and lead her to live beyond her means. The third class of education is recommended for the ‘shop-keeping’ class with no time to educate their children themselves. This channel of education is restricted to needlework, cookery, and laundry to prepare the girls to enter service, or for marriage to a man of low rank or small trade.

With a focus on acquiring useful skills rather than more charming accomplishments, Ellison suspects that parents may be reluctant to pursue this course of education for their children. Without talents honed for display, there will be no immediately visible signs of progress. Nevertheless, he supports the aims and sends girls he knows to be educated in this manner. Such a rigid class distinction does not promote social mobility. The ladies of Millenium Hall may defy societal limitations imposed on the by gender in terms of showing how it is possible to live outside of the patriarchal structure of marriage, but they displace these freedoms by enforcing class boundaries.

Although Ellison himself is presented as a benevolent slave owner, this is not an abolitionist text.<sup>112</sup> However, Betty Rizzo does offer an alternative reading to challenge the view that Scott fails to overhaul structures of race and class limitation in her work. Even though Ellison exclaims that he is not a Leveller, Rizzo stresses that he does adopt a gradualist approach to reform by supporting promising boys without the means to further their education and improving conditions for slaves on his Jamaican plantation. Ellison may be presented as a meliorist rather than an abolitionist, but he does acknowledge the difference between nature and society:

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<sup>111</sup> Scott, *Ellison*, p. 95.

<sup>112</sup> A possible reason for maintaining the structures of slavery in the text is to suggest a link between slavery and marriage. Moira Ferguson has equated the enforced or arranged marriages described by Scott with slavery, arguing: ‘where white British women are degraded and rendered powerless, Scott introduces an unspoken connection in her text. Both slaves and white women are controlled by politically empowered males.’ See Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p 104.

That gender, class, and racial equality are her ideals is undeniable because they are the conditions she attributes to heaven. “When you and I are laid in the grave,” Ellison tells his wife, “our lowest black slave will be as great as we are; in the next world perhaps even greater; the present difference is merely adventitious, not natural.” And what is natural, Scott tells us again and again, takes moral precedence over what is merely socially constructed.<sup>113</sup>

The Projects of *Millenium Hall* and *Sir George Ellison* can, therefore, be seen as a work in progress rather than a utopian vision, with Scott’s aim to inspire real world change through emulation.

Although *Ellison* was criticized as a derivative work, considered inferior to Richardson’s *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) by *The Critical Review*,<sup>114</sup> the influence of Sarah Scott can be traced through the heroines of Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Brunton, Jane Austen, and Frances Burney.<sup>115</sup> The immediate influence of *Millenium Hall* can be seen in the anonymously-penned novel *The Reward of Virtue; Or, The History of Miss Polly Graham* (1769), where Bounty Hall is presented as a utopian vision of female education supported by female philanthropy akin to that promoted by Scott. Here, the ‘second rank education’ is designed for those of middling rank with ‘no prospect of considerable fortunes’. Therefore, the focus is on teaching useful rather than ornamental accomplishments. As seen in Scott’s work: ‘Even drawing was not taught, except where so extraordinary a genius [sic] appeared as might give room to believe it might prove a useful

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<sup>113</sup> Rizzo, ‘Introduction’ to *Ellison*, p. xxxii.

<sup>114</sup> Anon, ‘X. *The History of Sir George Ellison*’, *The Critical review, or, Annals of literature*, ed. by Tobias George Smollett, Vol. 21: April 1766 (London: Printed for A. Hamilton, 1766), pp. 281-88 (p. 288): ‘we may venture to recommend it to the perusal of every man of fortune, who has more money than he can rationally employ, except in generous and beneficent acts, and those who do not recollect Mr. Richardson’s *Grandison*, will discover great merit in it.’

<sup>115</sup> The ‘female difficulties’ faced by Burney’s lone musician heroine in *The Wanderer* (1814) as she struggles to make her own way in the world without a fixed patronymic identity to rely upon, along with the ruined complexion of the classical scholar Eugenia in *Camilla* (1796), are key examples where Scott’s influence upon Burney can be seen. See Frances Burney, *Camilla; Or, A Picture of Youth*, ed. by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2009), and *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties* (London, Sydney, Wellington: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1988).

and profitable art.’<sup>116</sup> Whilst class distinctions remain in place, the message regarding the importance of female education proliferates. Alessa Johns has demonstrated how ‘reproduction’, in its broadest sense, is key to the success of the female utopia, describing a process of imitation whereby ‘one ideal community formed another; one text called forth a sequel.’<sup>117</sup> Mary Hamilton’s 1778 novel *Munster Village*, therefore, can be read as a retort to the isolated community depicted in *Millenium Hall*.

When *Munster Village* was published in 1778, the anonymous reviewer writing in *The Town and Country Magazine* praised Hamilton’s work: ‘This is, we may venture to pronounce, one of the best Novels that has been published since the time of Goldsmith.’<sup>118</sup> *Munster Village* is the utopian artistic community founded by Lady Frances when she inherits the family estate from her father, Lord Munster. The frame narrative to the novel tells of how her brother, Lord Finlay, is disinherited for marrying against his father’s wishes. The young couple move to Wales, where it is hoped that they will be able to live according to their reduced income. Rather than present the situation as a rural idyll, Hamilton emphasizes the difficulties of raising a family in isolation. Although the sublime vistas inspire the landscape paintings that Lady Finlay sells to supplement their income, the harsh conditions prove detrimental to her health and prevent her from completing any further works. With a lack of financial, social, and medical support, Lady Finlay subsequently dies for what Hamilton terms ‘want of proper assistance’.<sup>119</sup> Lord Finlay soon follows his wife to an early grave, leaving a boy and a girl behind. Lady Frances, therefore, sees herself as a custodian of

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<sup>116</sup> Anon, *The Reward of Virtue; Or, The History of Miss Polly Graham* (London: J. Roson and William Cooke, 1769), pp. 209-11.

<sup>117</sup> Alessa Johns, *Women’s Utopias*, p. 2: Showing the power of imitation, Johns’s research charts the influence of eighteenth-century utopian texts by British women writers on their French counterparts.

<sup>118</sup> Anon. ‘New Publications Examined: Munster Village, a Novel’, *The Town and Country Magazine*, June 1778 (London: A. Hamilton, 1778), p. 324.

<sup>119</sup> Mary Hamilton, *Munster Village* (London and New York: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1987), p. 17.

the estate rather than the rightful heir, and sets about making improvements so that it will be a profitable concern once her surviving nephew is of an age to inherit.

### **The Artist Isolated in Arcadia**

Hamilton's characterization of Wales is pre-Romantic in that the sublime natural landscape provides a source of artistic inspiration for Lady Finlay. Although the wild vistas have an aesthetic appeal, and provide a point of visual comparison to the Arcadian rural idyll, this is not a location which can sustain life in the long-term, and Lady Finlay dies in isolation having gone against the fifth commandment by marrying without parental consent. Hamilton ultimately places value in urban civilization above rural isolation. Even though Wales officially constitutes part of Great Britain, Hamilton plays on the difference between England and Wales to present crossing the border as a move into exile. Linda Colley has suggested that by the end of the eighteenth century most inhabitants of the British Isles saw themselves as British. However, Bethan Jenkins argues that 'the two cultures saw themselves as distinctly and essentially different, whether or not one also accepts Linda Colley's thesis'.<sup>120</sup> As a Scottish writer, raised during the Scottish Enlightenment, Scotland is too familiar and progressive a space for Hamilton to exploit.

Born Lady Mary Leslie in 1736, the youngest daughter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Leven and Melville took the surname of George Robinson Hamilton after separating from her husband. She had married Dr James Walker in 1762, but the union proved to be an unhappy one, and Walker left for Jamaica leaving his estranged wife needing to write to support their family. In a letter of 1818, Hamilton would later complain that 'with a family of young children [...]

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<sup>120</sup> Bethan Jenkins, *Between Wales and England: Anglophone Welsh Writing of the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), p. 5; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 1992).

abandoned by their father' she was forced to publish to 'cloath, feed, and educate them'.<sup>121</sup> Hamilton uses the novel form to enter philosophical discussion, engaging in debates on women's education, marriage, property, and the role of the arts to the extent that her biographer, Dorothy McMillan, accuses her work of being 'marred by sententiousness and relentless intellectual name-dropping.'<sup>122</sup> Although Alessa Johns suggests that Hamilton's feminist utopian ideas influenced Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay, her tendency to such rich allusion to other works led to accusations of plagiarism. However, Johns argues that her use of other people's work 'was part and parcel of her utopian vision' as it effectively promotes the 'democratic access' to ideas, the circulation of which can inspire national improvement.<sup>123</sup> The copies Lady Finlay paints from Poussin can be seen as part of this 'democratization of ideas.'

With the aristocratic hero left without a family allowance, it is down to the heroine to provide. Hamilton emphasizes the message that there is no scandal in working, and everyone should be educated to earn a living. Lady Finlay's French convent education may have seen her schooled in accomplishments above her station as a tutor's daughter, but painting is presented as a proper use of her time.

She had a fine genius for painting, and in that art did wonders. By the sale only of a Crucifixion, and an Arcadia, she maintained her family for two years. She concealed her name, lest she should irritate Lord Munster more against her; but had too much good sense to be ashamed of employing those talents, bestowed on her by nature for so natural a purpose. And the hours that the indolent devote to rest, the licentious to pleasure, she dedicate to providing bread for her family. Good blood cannot be kept up, without the shambles of the market, so it is no scandal to procure that by ingenuity or industry, when appendages of gentility are so far reduced as not to afford it otherwise.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Mary Hamilton, Letter dated 1818, in *The Melvilles, earls of Melville, and the Leslies, earls of Leven*, ed. by W. Fraser, Vol. 2 of 3 (Edinburgh: 1890), p. 329.

<sup>122</sup> Dorothy McMillan, 'Walker [née Leslie; known as Hamilton], Lady Mary (1736–1822)', ODNB, Published in print and online: 23 September 2004, [online]: <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12115>> [accessed 24/01/20]

<sup>123</sup> Johns, *Women's Utopias*, p. 129.

<sup>124</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 16.

The Arcadia Lady Finlay paints is a copy of Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*. Painted between 1637 and 1640, *Et in Arcadia Ego*,<sup>125</sup> alternatively known as *Les Bergers d'Arcadie* or *The Arcadian Shepherds*, depicts three shepherds who have stumbled upon a tomb. The men gather round to read the Latin inscription from which the painting takes its name, whilst a mysterious female figure, whom according to Judith E. Bernstock 'may represent a beneficent but inevitable Death',<sup>126</sup> knowingly looks on.



**Figure 1.6: Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia ego* (deuxième version c. 1637-40), Musée du Louvre, Paris (Public Domain).**

<sup>125</sup> The precise translation of the epitaph *Et in Arcadia Ego* has long been subject to debate amongst art historians. For Erwin Panofsky "Death is even in Arcadia" (not "*I too was an Arcadian*") represents 'the only grammatically correct interpretation of the Latin phrase *Et in Arcadia ego*'. For Panofsky, *ego* refers to death itself, not the departed Arcadian, making this the voice of Death personified. Whichever translation is favoured, the painting serves as a *memento mori*, showing that death comes to everyone, even in the pastoral earthly paradise of Arcadia. Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 296.

<sup>126</sup> Judith E. Bernstock, 'Death in Poussin's Second *Et in Arcadia Ego*', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History*, 55.2 (1986), 54-66 (p.54).

Oskar Bätschmann does not think it coincidental that one of the shepherds ‘points his finger precisely at the edge of the shadow’ rather than at the inscription itself. This, he states, ‘is a reminder of the origins of drawing in the tracing of a shadow’s outline.’<sup>127</sup> The image can, therefore, be read as an allegory of art. In this case, the statuesque woman, who rests her hand on the shepherd’s shoulder in consolation, could be seen as a Muse inspiring creativity, with the preserving capacity of art posing a challenge to death.

Women artists are particularly associated with the production of copies because their training was often limited to copying from the Old Masters with it being socially unacceptable for a woman to learn to paint anatomically correct figures from life. The version of Arcadia Lady Finlay paints reflects her isolated surroundings in Wales. She does not paint a slavish reproduction of Poussin’s work; the scope for invention within an imitation sees the sublime scenery of her new home merged with Poussin’s vision of Arcadia. A copy, therefore, does not merely meet the popular demand for versions of a fashionable image, or become an initial means of training the artist in the mechanics of painting without the need for invention. Here it testifies to a women’s artistic talent, and provides a framework to re-work what has been done before.<sup>128</sup>

J. David Macey’s research identifies that Mary Hamilton in fact re-uses the idea of copying Poussin’s *Et in Arcadia ego* from Thomas Amory’s novel *Memoirs: Containing the Lives of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1755). Inspired by the literary trend for female biography, particularly George Ballard’s *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), Thomas Amory’s digressive novel follows the fictional narrator’s encounters with various

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<sup>127</sup> Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: Dialectics of Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 56. The act of tracing a shadow alludes to the accounts given by both Pliny the Elder and Quintilian regarding the origins of drawing. Pliny tells of how the Corinthian maid traces the shadow her lover casts on a wall so that she will have a reminder of him when he leaves to fight in the war. Quintilian, on the other hand, locates the origins of drawing actually in Arcadia, with a shepherd tracing the outline of his own shadow in the dusty ground. In both cases art is presented as a means of capturing the transience of the shadow to provide a record.

<sup>128</sup> There will be scope for a wider consideration of women and copies in Chapter Three of this thesis.

exemplary women. Miss Marinda Bruce is a virtuous orphan, who has been left to manage Hali-farm on her own when the narrator recognizes this beautiful figure in the Arcadian landscape as the daughter of an old friend. Having been ably taught by her father in everything from mathematics to music and art, she is a veritable ‘philosopher in petticoats’, with the narrator boasting that: ‘There is nothing superior to her in George Ballard’s Collection.’<sup>129</sup> Miss Bruce spends any free time she has skilfully copying works of the Old Masters or painting the pastoral landscapes of her Northumberland home:

Her happy fancy, and the prospects in the country she lives in, supplied her with vales more charming than those of Juan Fernandez, with lawns like those of Tinian, and finer water-falls than Quibo has. She has copied the greatest beautys in nature, and formed the finest imitations. The invention of the whole is vastly pleasing.<sup>130</sup>

Hamilton takes Amory’s words describing his heroine’s painting of Arcadia and applies them to Lady Finlay’s *Arcadia*. Rather than being considered an act of plagiarism, Macey suggests that this is a tactic for entering a dialogue with Amory.<sup>131</sup>

Hamilton re-writes Amory’s work to argue against the rural isolation of women who have a vital role to play in improving the nation. Noting the affective power of art, the narrator does concede that such a work as Miss Bruce’s *Arcadia* could have more of an improving influence on young minds than dry sermons preached down from the pulpit.<sup>132</sup> However, with Miss Bruce living in rural isolation people won’t get to see her painting and therefore it is difficult to see how its moral message and influence could spread. It is following the death of the artist in Arcadia that Hamilton sets about re-writing Amory’s

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas Amory, *Memoirs: Containing the Lives of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (London: John Noon, 1755), p. 12.

<sup>130</sup> Amory, *Memoirs*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>131</sup> Alessa Johns also discusses Hamilton’s ‘plagiarism’, identifying lengthy passages from Daniel Defoe’s *Political History of the Devil* (1726) in *Munster Village*. For Johns, Hamilton’s authorial practice represents a tactic to replicate visions of utopia. See Alessa Johns, *Women’s Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>132</sup> Amory, *Memoirs*, pp. 24-25.

*Memoirs* to shift the focus from the isolated artist to the cosmopolitan utopia of Munster Village. Here men and women are educated to support themselves and assist one another, and improvement spreads through social contact.

### **The Mixed Community of Munster Village**

Lady Frances has a utopian vision of founding a community where everyone can work together to contribute to the common good: ‘She considered society is manifestly maintained by a circulation of kindness: we are all of us, in some way or other, wanting assistance, and in like manner qualified to give it.’<sup>133</sup> With this ethos in mind, Lady Frances consults Mr Brown and Mr Adams, alluding to the fashionable garden designer Lancelot ‘capability’ Brown and the architect Robert Adam, to realize her intentions:

Lady Frances sent for Mr Brown, who found great *capabilities* in the situation: under his direction it is now one of the finest places in England. She acquainted him of her intention of building a number of houses for the reception of artificers, and the introduction of certain manufactures. He fixed upon a beautiful situation, at the side of a navigable river. Mr Adams approved very much of the plan Lady Frances submitted to his inspection – he perfected and improved it. It consisted of one hundred houses; and a *tribuna* in the centre.<sup>134</sup>

The location, by a navigable river, ensures a line of communication with the world beyond Munster Village, whilst the *tribuna* at the heart of the scheme is a seat of learning to disseminate knowledge: ‘The sciences and arts are assembled together in this fine building, and connected (if I may be allowed the expression) by a large and well chosen library.’<sup>135</sup> As well as a public library, the academy houses an astronomical observatory, an amphitheatre for study of anatomy, and apartments for painting, sculpture, and architecture and filled with casts of antique originals for the students to copy. In amassing an impressive art collection,

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<sup>133</sup> Mary Hamilton, *Munster Village* (London and New York: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>134</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>135</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 22.

Lady Frances hopes to promote the progress of the arts, and especially wants to encourage native talent in the prestigious genre of history painting. As proposed by Hume, Hamilton describes how the progress of the arts will go hand in hand with progress of the nation:

In this charming mansion is blended the improvement of the arts, with that of philosophy: an exquisite assemblage of all the sweets of life. Architecture, statuary, painting, and music, find in her a patroness. Refinement of taste in a nation, is always accompanied with refinement of manners. People accustomed to behold order and elegance in public buildings, and public gardens, acquire urbanity in private.<sup>136</sup>

Here students work according to whatever talent or genius they display for what they are naturally suited, with the aim of improving the nation, not just their lives as individuals. Alongside the two hundred male students, twenty women are also admitted, bringing the education of men and women together in separate wings of this one establishment:

One angle of the *tribuna* is entirely dedicated to the education of women. Twenty young ladies are admitted, and there are funds for their perpetual maintenance, as that of the two hundred scholars. In the selection of these young gentlewomen, she always gives the preference to those who labour under any imperfection of the body – endeavouring, by increasing their resources *within themselves*, to compensate for their *outward defects*. When it is found that any of these ladies have a taste for any manual or mental art, they cultivate it.<sup>137</sup>

Women may only represent 10% of the student body, but through their inclusion the academy grants these women a place in society. As in *Millenium Hall*, the idea of the accomplished beauty pursuing the arts to attract a rich husband is replaced with a vision of disabled or disadvantaged women cultivating their artistic talent to give them practical skills of value to society.

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<sup>136</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>137</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 25.

Hamilton presents Munster Village as an ideal community, a new Parnassus which is duly dubbed ‘a seat of the muses’,<sup>138</sup> but Susan Staves identifies a real-life precedent of Lady Frances in Catherine the Great. Staves compares the development of Munster Village to the program of reform initiated when Catherine began ruling Russia in her own right.<sup>139</sup> Numerous intellectual societies and educational establishments were founded and the arts flourished under her patronage. Furthermore, Staves notes, ‘Catherine also invited foreign artisans to establish themselves in Russia, offered settlers temporary exemptions from taxes, and declared freedom of economic enterprise’ just as Lady Frances does in Munster Village. According to Staves, Hamilton uses the novel of romance ‘to imagine a woman so powerful than she can positively transform national culture, creating a fiction that defies the laws of novelistic verisimilitude, then reminds her readers of a living historical figure who seems to have precisely that power’.<sup>140</sup> In balancing the qualities of a real woman with a romantic ideal, Lady Frances has the duality of one of Samuel’s Muses.

On the surface Munster Village sounds like the perfect place for men and women to live and learn together, what with the progressive views on women’s education, and the diffusion of wealth amongst citizens: ‘The sums Lady Frances expended in bringing these plans to perfection, diffused riches and plenty among the people.’<sup>141</sup> However, the community is segregated, with hierarchical divisions built in to the very architectural structure of the settlement: ‘The streets, which were built on each side of the *Tribuna*, were uniform, and the houses ornamented with emblematical figures of the different trades intended for the possessors.’ What’s more, ‘The size of the houses decreases gradually from

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<sup>138</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 27.

<sup>139</sup> Catherine the Great reigned as Empress of Russia between 9 July 1762 and 17 November 1796, having seized power from her husband, Peter III, in a coup d’état.

<sup>140</sup> Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain*, p. 387.

<sup>141</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 29.

the centre of every street'.<sup>142</sup> Nicole Pohl defines country-house literature as 'a literature that is concerned with social transformation and change',<sup>143</sup> but describes the town planning in *Munster Village* and *Millenium Hall* as a 'Chain of Being'<sup>144</sup> that keeps people in their place. Women may 'have always felt the need to imagine other places and spaces which transcend their own alienation, be it social, economic or cultural', yet 'both Millenium Hall and Munster Village also illustrate the exclusiveness of polite utopias.'<sup>145</sup> Susan Staves agrees, stating that Sarah Scott's belief that the underprivileged 'can be improved by education and opportunity coexists with her equally consistent idea that good women and men of genteel birth are the only appropriate governors of women and men of ungentle birth'.<sup>146</sup> *Millenium Hall* not only depends on a significant financial investment, but functions as a Panopticon, whereby behaviour is self-regulated to avoid being voted out of the community.<sup>147</sup> Given that those with money govern the poor and disabled, Judith Broome argues that the Millenium Hall model reproduces the structure of a patriarchal society. The segregation between the main manor house, the cottages for the poor, and the compound for the disfigured, 'geographically represents the exclusions and displacements of the society the women of the hall are trying to escape'.<sup>148</sup> Although Mary Hamilton develops the conversation regarding the space for women's learning in *Munster Village*, opportunity remains capped. Lady Frances only sees herself as a caretaker of the estate she improves to hand over to her nephew, but she does demonstrate capability. Whilst the spirit of democracy may not be

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<sup>142</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 27.

<sup>143</sup> Pohl, 'The Country House as Utopia', p. 53.

<sup>144</sup> 'Chain of Being' is a quotation Pohl takes from Alexander Pope's 'Essay on Man' (1733-4). See *The Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Andrew Crozier (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), pp. 190-228 (Epistle I, VIII, 5, p. 197).

<sup>145</sup> Pohl, 'The Country House as Utopia', p. 88.

<sup>146</sup> Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain*, pp. 355-56.

<sup>147</sup> Jeremy Bentham's architectural plans for circular, 'panoptical' institutional buildings, such as prisons and asylums, developed during the 1780s included a central viewing tower, from which all the surrounding cells could be seen. The metaphorical application of the term 'Panopticon' is apt here given the theory that behaviour will be self-regulated/reformed under the possibility of constant surveillance.

<sup>148</sup> Judith Broome, *Fictive Domains*, p. 149.

evident in the architecture, it is visible in the art collection. In the public display of copies taken from Raphael's work for all to enjoy, Hamilton is openly critical of George III's decision to keep his Raphael cartoons behind closed doors.<sup>149</sup>

*Munster Village* ends with a masquerade that brings Raphael's *The School of Athens* to life as a tableau vivant. In celebration of Lady Frances's marriage to Lord Darnley, costumed revellers descend in the guise of Greeks (Aristotle, Apelles, Pindar, and Plato), Romans (Cicero, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid) and Italians (Michael Angelo [sic], Raphael, Titian, Ariosto, and Tasso) to pay tribute to Lady Frances for her achievements at Munster Village:

Michael Angelo, that celebrated restorer of the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, expressed how infinitely he was charmed with Munster Village. – 'What is really beautiful, said he, does not depend either upon fashion, or times; there may be *different ways* of expressing things in different ages; but there can only *be one* of conceiving them properly.' The temple, in which they were, was adorned with the paintings of Raphael, copied by an able artist. Lady Darnley, pointing to these, (and addressing him) said 'There is proof how much we fall short, how faintly we copy originals!'<sup>150</sup>

The paintings alluded to are versions of *The School of Athens* and *Parnassus*, and Lady Frances politely suggests that these copies 'fall short' of Raphael's originals. How the works differ is not described, but the famous frescoes have provided a guide to greatness for the 'able artist' to copy as they develop their own work, and, as Michael Angelo observes, find '*different ways* of expressing things in different ages'. Lady Frances may have been inspired by the classical past, but resists naming her settlement *Athens* because it is not a direct replica. They are living in a different age with different belief systems. There have been scientific discoveries and advancements in knowledge, but the classical model provides a

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<sup>149</sup> See Johns, *Women's Utopias*, p. 125.

<sup>150</sup> Hamilton, *Munster Village*, p. 132.

template to build upon. In the case of Richard Samuel's *Portraits of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, this painting has continued to provide a reference point for the representation of the woman artist.

Daniel Maclise's lithograph *Regina's Maids of Honour* published in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (January 1836), depicts a convivial circle of literary ladies gathered around the tea-table: Anna Maria Hall, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Mary Russell Mitford, Lady Sydney Morgan, Harriet Martineau, Jane Porter, Caroline Norton and Marguerite, Countess of Blessington are all engaged in conversation in a similar way to how Samuel's depicts his *Nine Living Muses*.



Figure 1.7: Daniel Maclise, *Regina's Maids of Honour* (January 1836), published in *Fraser's Magazine*, Vol. XIII (following p. 80), image courtesy of: <http://victorianweb.org/art/illustration/maclise/14.html>

However, Eger identifies a key difference in the setting: 'Unlike Samuel's Living Muses, who appear in an abstract and idealized exterior location, Maclise's eight learned 'ladies' are

safely contained within a familiar, domestic interior.’<sup>151</sup> For Eger, Maclise’s decision to veil the individual ideas and achievements of these figures ‘domesticates intellectual women in order to make them more palatable, while at the same time belittling their achievement’.<sup>152</sup> That said, a process of rehabilitation was needed to counteract the negative effect of Rowlandson’s caricature, *The Breaking Up of the Blue Stocking Club*. By applying Linda Colley’s model of women’s influence on the nation, it is possible to reconcile women’s intellectual work and domestic space. In *Britons* (1992), Colley problematizes the separate-spheres ideology by highlighting the ways in which women could actively engage in politics even if they lacked the right to vote. Her reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s works not only demonstrates how women could exert influence within the domestic sphere, but also legitimizes their wider political involvement: ‘For if politics was indistinguishable from morality, as he always claimed, then surely women as guardians of morality must have some right of access to the politics?’<sup>153</sup> Although Rousseau emphasized the differences between the sexes in *Emile* (1762), it is the domesticated woman who nurtures the next generation of leaders. As Colley notes: ‘Subordinate and artificial though his ideal woman was, she was also indispensable to the well-being of the state through her private influence on her citizen husband and the education of her children.’<sup>154</sup> The possibility of maintaining a balance between work and home life remains a question to be addressed in subsequent chapters of this thesis as women writers attempt to reconcile their public and private lives.

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<sup>151</sup> Eger, ‘The Bluestocking Legacy’, in *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 127-51 (p. 133).

<sup>152</sup> Eger, ‘The Bluestocking Legacy’, p. 132.

<sup>153</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 274.

<sup>154</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 273.

## Conclusions

Proving the lasting appeal of Samuel's *Living Muses*, a modern-day reimagining was commissioned by *Country Life* in 1996. Derry Moore's *Modern Muses of Great Britain* (1996) features nine women deemed representative of the spirit of the nation: educationalist, Tessa Blackstone; ballerina, Darcey Bussell; painter, Emma Sergeant; soprano, Emma Kirkby; fashion designer, Vivienne Westwood, percussionist, Evelyn Glennie; horsewoman, Mary Elizabeth King; interior designer, Sarah Hervey-Bathurst; and actress, Tracy Louise Ward, Marchioness of Worcester. Produced at the height of 'Cool Britannia', the composition expresses national pride and progress in a way intended to inspire the readership. As the accompanying editorial expresses: 'The areas in which their [the Muses'] excellence is expressed have evolved, but their qualities of social poise and accomplishment remain the same ... They are gracious in their determination to succeed; their independence of spirit is an example to others.'<sup>155</sup> This bold statement not only shows how Samuel's work can provide a model for improvement, but highlights the difficulty of gaining acceptance when grace, beauty, and poise are taken as signifiers of talent. The issues of physical appearance and social class will be interrogated further in the next chapter, in relation to the concept of female accomplishment.

The dialogue established between the literary and visual representations of female artists discussed illustrates the difficulty in negotiating the tensions of being both a woman and an artist. Although Samuel, Scott, and Hamilton differ in their approaches to representing the value of female artists to society, all three offer a harmonious image of female creativity that is intended to celebrate how women can improve the nation. These are idealized depictions of artistic communities that appeal to a mythic classical past to provide dignity and

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<sup>155</sup> Rupert Uloth and Isambard Wilkins, 'Nine Modern Muses', *Country Life*, 24 October 1996, p. 41. Quoted by Eger in *Brilliant Women*, pp. 148-49.

precedent to the figure of the woman artist. As a figure of duality, passively inspiring creativity in others whilst being a skilled practitioner herself, the Muse provides an apt allegory for female artistry. However, the apotheosis of the woman artist creates a spectacle that puts creative women on a pedestal to be admired and viewed as special cases, rather than accepted into intellectual life. Idealizing women also takes attention away from the difficulties faced in pursuing their chosen art, and places emphasis on their aesthetic appearance. This thesis will continue to look at the representation of the female artist during the latter half of the century by addressing what is celebrated and what is deemed unacceptable behaviour.

## Chapter Two

### Accomplished Females: The Class and Courtship of the Artist Heroine in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), *The Old Manor House* (1793), and *Montalbert* (1795)

No one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address, and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)<sup>1</sup>

With a wide-ranging artistic education considered a prerequisite for being accepted as an accomplished female, novels of the long eighteenth century are populated by heroines who are adept at everything from painting portraits to playing the pianoforte. In the frequently cited exchange from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mr Bingley enthusiastically declares: 'I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.'<sup>2</sup> The suggestion that 'accomplished' is a grossly over-used epithet is evident in Mr Darcy's retort: 'I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished'.<sup>3</sup> Their remarks not only reveal their differing standards regarding what makes a woman accomplished, but also offer an insight into the problematic social status of so-called 'accomplished females'. The long list of skills and attributes required by Bingley's sister, Caroline, in order for her to consider a young lady truly accomplished, quoted here as an epigraph, exemplifies what Ann Bermingham refers to as the 'trope of lack' within the discourse of female accomplishment: 'Because it depended so much on Miss Bingley's "certain something", this ineffable je ne sais quoi made feminine accomplishment an ideal that could never be fully attained, critiqued, or transcended. Instead

<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 32-33.

it operated like an ever-present reproach.’<sup>4</sup> Miss Bingley snidely takes advantage of the unquantifiable nature of accomplishment as a form of social gatekeeping to exclude those she considers inferior. Furthermore, despite the verb ‘accomplish’ meaning ‘to finish’, women are constantly required to acquire ever more accomplishments to attract a husband. The trope of lack, therefore, is as intrinsic to the idea of accomplishment as the aim to attract the male gaze. Darcy ends the conversation with the scathing observation that ‘there is meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable’.<sup>5</sup> There is a marked social anxiety surrounding the acquisition of accomplishments, not just in terms of what skills and pastimes make a woman worthy of the term ‘accomplished’, but the motivation behind acquiring them. Given that the acquisition of artistic skill is associated with attracting male attention for the purposes of securing a socially advantageous marriage, this chapter seeks to interrogate the intersection between appearance, class, and skill in the representation of accomplished heroines.

Austen is responding to the accomplishment debates waged throughout the long eighteenth century, but Carol Shiner Wilson notes that by the 1790s accomplishment had become ‘a code word for dangerous, idle, upper-class pastimes of women who were self-absorbed and neglectful of their families’.<sup>6</sup> With the period marked by the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) highlighted as particularly worthy of investigation, the novels of Charlotte Smith, whose popularity was at its peak, will provide an apt case study to analyse how she presents an artist heroine amidst the discourse of female accomplishment.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Shiner Wilson, ‘Lost Needles, Tangled Threads: Stitchery, Domesticity, and Artistic Enterprise in Barbauld, Edgeworth, Taylor and Lamb’, in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 167-90 (p. 175).

In her novels, Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) works to separate genuine artistic talents from accomplishments merely pursued to attract the male gaze by pairing characters with contrasting skills and modes of conduct. Smith's critique of female accomplishment, therefore, represents an act of reclamation similar to that presented by Maria Cosway in her Hogarthian series of prints, *The Progress of Female Virtue* and *The Progress of Female Dissipation* (c. 1800).



**Figure 2.1: Maria Cosway, from *The Progress of Female Virtue* (c. 1800), engraved by A. Cardon from the Original Drawings by Mrs. Cosway (London: R. Ackermann, 1800), photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery, Accession No. 1980.35.1a-1 (Public Domain).**

Using artistic practice as a means to delineate virtue and vice, one of the images depicting virtuous conduct shows a woman sat demurely at a window, immersed in the act of drawing the landscape before her. The accompanying caption reads: ‘While Nature’s beauties her free lines pourtray,| She knows not that she’s fairer far than they.’ In contrast, the companion plate

representing vice shows a woman poised ready to play the harp, her neck outstretched in order to catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror.



**Figure 2.2: Maria Cosway, from *The Progress of Female Dissipation* (c. 1800), engraved by A. Cardon from the Original Drawings by Mrs. Cosway (London: R. Ackermann, 1800), photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery, Accession No. 1980.35.2a-1 (Public Domain).**

The choice of harp here is significant as Noël Riley describes this instrument as ‘an obvious and highly gilded status symbol’,<sup>7</sup> noting that it is a harp that increases Mary Crawford’s ‘beauty, wit, and good humour’<sup>8</sup> in *Mansfield Park* (1814). Furthermore, with the instrument positioned between a woman’s parted legs, it conveys her sexual availability. The caption, ‘Her own fair image in the glass appears,| To that she bends, to that her eye she

<sup>7</sup> Noël Riley, *The Accomplished Lady: A History of Genteel Pursuits c. 1660-1860* (Huddersfield: Oblong, 2017), p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 65.

rears', is adapted from Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock' (c. 1712)<sup>9</sup> to emphasize the fact that the woman depicted shows a high degree of self-awareness in terms of the spectacle her adopted attitude will create. Thus, it is the staged position, rather than the actual music produced, that will be subject to the aesthetic judgement of the male gaze. The ideal of the accomplished female elides the aesthetic appeal of the artist with that of her art, meaning that the elegant poise of the landscape artist could have the same appeal, but it is the self-aware, dual perspective of the looker/looked upon purposefully performing the societal expectation of femininity that is being criticized here.

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972) John Berger outlines the dual position of the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* as intrinsic to a woman's identity:

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.<sup>10</sup>

In Berger's model the female is effectively trapped by the male gaze. Even though the accompanying caption reveals that the landscape artist is supposedly unaware of her aesthetic appeal, she is still subject to the judgment of being 'fairer far' than her work. Michael Fried's research on the relationship between art and the beholder in French painting identifies a shift towards depictions of absorption during the mid-eighteenth century. Fried asserts that 'one primitive condition of the art of painting' is 'that its objects necessarily imply the presence before them of a beholder'.<sup>11</sup> Where 'theatrical' portraits illustrate an awareness of being

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander Pope, 'The Rape of the Lock', in *The Works of Alexander Pope* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), p. 90: 'A heav'nly image in the glass appears, | To that she bends, to that her eye she rears.' Canto I, Lines 125-26. Maria Cosway's reference is taken from the description of Belinda's Toilet, whereby a male viewer's account of artificial female allurements is given in mock-heroic form. Pope's poem was first published in 1712, revised in 1714, and finalised as a 5 canto version in 1717.

<sup>10</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC & Penguin, 1972), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 4.

viewed by portraying the sitter looking out at the beholder, 'absorptive' works portray their subjects engrossed by their occupation. The landscape artist in Cosway's print is completely absorbed by the act of drawing, seemingly unaware of the possibility of being watched, but the musician complicates the idea that absorption works to negate the presence of a beholder. Viewing herself in the mirror, she is absorbed not in her music, but in how she will be seen.

Produced at the time when Cosway was returning to her profession after a period spent as a dutiful wife and mother, the piece acts as a manifesto in defence of the female artist, reclaiming professionalism from the realm of accomplishment. With accomplishments cultivated for display placed in direct contrast with natural talent as a strategy to defend her own work as a woman writer, Smith's novels similarly promote the importance of women's artistic labour.

Charlotte Smith is a writer whose financial need to publish her work has been well documented, not least of all by Smith herself. Not only do her performative prefaces speak candidly of her need to write in order to support her children, but her works of fiction often reflect her personal plight with the inclusion of a wronged heroine denied her rightful inheritance, a dissolute husband, or an untrustworthy lawyer. Biographical accounts, from Walter Scott's short *Memoir* (1827) to Loraine Fletcher's *Critical Biography* (1998), emphasize the connection between Smith's personal life and the content of her work. As expressed by Walter Scott: 'every one, whether of sad or gay temperament must regret that the tone of melancholy which pervades Mrs Smith's compositions, was derived too surely from the circumstances and feelings of the amiable Authoress.'<sup>12</sup> Loraine Fletcher records how readers discerned more than just a melancholy tone to Smith's work, noting that the character of Mrs Stafford in *Emmeline* was easily identified as a fictionalized version of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sir Walter Scott, 'Memoir of Charlotte Smith', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol 4 of 28 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1849), pp. 20-70 (p. 68). Scott offers his critical assessment as an addendum to the account of Smith's life provided by her sister, Catherine Anne Dorset.

author herself.<sup>13</sup> For Fletcher this is evidence of how ‘she shrewdly promoted her career, gained sympathy for her problems as a single mother and turned herself into a celebrity through self-revelation.’<sup>14</sup> However, such a revelatory authorial practice did not always work in her favour. Anna Seward, for one, found it ‘indelicate’ for Smith to write of the Stafford’s unhappy marriage so candidly given that the parallels between art and life were clearly courted:

I have always been told that Mrs. Smith designed, nay that she acknowledges, the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Stafford to be drawn for herself and her husband. Whatever may be Mr. Smith’s faults, surely it was wrong as indelicate, to hold up the man, whose name she bears, the father of her children, to public contempt in a novel. Then how sickening is the boundless vanity with which Mrs. Smith asserts that herself, under the name of Mrs. Stafford, is “a woman of first rate talents, cultivated to the highest possible degree.”<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin Smith was a dissolute brute with ever-mounting debts. The young Charlotte had been married off to him when she was just 15 years old, with the match conceived as a financially prudent means of enabling her father to clear his own gambling debts. Smith later described this arrangement as being ‘sold a legal prostitute’.<sup>16</sup> Despite being subjected to years of mental, physical, and financial hardship, Smith increasingly generated more censure than sympathy for writing her life into her works of fiction.<sup>17</sup> The idea that readers eventually

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<sup>13</sup> Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 100. Mrs Stafford, like Charlotte Smith, is a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, who is forced to flee to France with her husband to escape from his creditors. The links between this character’s experiences and Charlotte Smith’s biography mean these sections of the novel can be read as a roman-à-clef. Mrs Stafford serves as a warning to Emmeline not to be rushed or forced into a loveless marriage.

<sup>14</sup> Loraine Fletcher, ‘Introduction’ to *Emmeline* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward, written between the years 1784-1807*, Vol II of VI (London: Longman, Hunt, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1811), p. 215.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Smith, Letter to Sarah Rose, 15 June 1804, in *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 625.

<sup>17</sup> Smith finally separated from her husband in 1787. Relying upon her pen to support herself and her children meant that she felt forced to write at a pace to satisfy the market, not according to inspiration or inclination. Walter Scott compared the drudgery of her situation to that of a galley slave, and discerns that a lack of structure to her novels is a direct consequence of her writing to fulfil her financial needs: ‘she was too often summoned to her literary labours by the inexorable voice of necessity, which obliged her to write for the daily supply of the press, without having even rough-hewn, the course of incidents which she intended to detail.’ See Walter Scott, ‘Memoir of Charlotte Smith’, p. 65.

became tired of Smith's constant flow of self-revelatory writing is reflected in Judith Phillips Stanton's research into the literary marketplace, which has identified the height of Smith's popularity as between the years 1787 to 1798, before sales subsequently dropped.<sup>18</sup>

In the preface to her novel *The Banished Man* (1794), Smith defends herself against criticism she had received for too frequently alluding to her personal circumstances in her writing by comparing her work to that of artists: 'The History Painter', she says, 'gives to his figures the cast of countenance he is accustomed to see around him' and goes on to argue that 'a novelist, from the same causes, makes his drawing to resemble the characters he has occasion to meet with.'<sup>19</sup> This is not merely a useful analogy between sister arts, but an attempt to claim a place for female creativity within the hierarchy of the arts. As seen in the previous chapter, Richard Samuel used history painting as a means to increase the standing of his *Living Muses*. With history painting considered to be the pinnacle of fine art, Smith defends her writing in a way which raises the status of the woman writer. Although the arts of painting, drawing, and sewing pursued by her heroines fall into the realm of female accomplishment rather than grand, public works of art, Smith extends the interpretive scope of women's art by contrasting the honest, natural talents of her heroines with the more frivolous, artful pursuits of accomplished females. Whilst at school in Colchester, Charlotte Smith had taken painting lessons from the landscape painter, George Smith (c. 1713-1776), and the visual arts remained an influence upon her authorial practice. Focusing on the arts of drawing and sewing, this chapter will explore how Charlotte Smith reclaims genuine artistic creativity as a useful skill with economic worth. A close reading of the art produced by the heroines in *Emmeline*, *The Orphan of the Castle* (1788), *The Old Manor House* (1793), and *Montalbert* (1795) will show how Smith contributes to the debates surrounding female

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Phillips Stanton, 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business"', *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 1 (1987), 375-401 (p. 393).

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Smith, 'Preface' to *The Banished Man* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009), p. ii.

education at the end of the eighteenth century by dividing empty female accomplishments from useful artistic talent.

Whilst Smith appeals to the familiar tropes of female accomplishment in her romance plots, she uses art and accomplishment to subvert expectations. Starting with Smith's first novel, *Emmeline*, it will be argued that Smith defies convention to show that it is a mistake to view women's art as the product of romantic interest. Emmeline does not need a marriage to her cousin Delamere to legitimize her when she is in fact the rightful heir to Mowbray Castle. *The Old Manor House* goes further in challenging class and gender roles by presenting a heroine who is not legitimized by recovered aristocratic origins. The value and virtue in women's work is exemplified through Monimia's honest labour, as opposed to the vain accomplishments of Miss Hollybourn. Although Smith presents a caricature of an accomplished heroine in her characterization of Miss Hollybourn, ridiculing her for her lack of beauty and skill, Smith does not always rely upon this image. Finally, *Montalbert* shows how a heroine can be led astray by the lure of accomplishments and the male attention they bring. The contested status of accomplishment allows Smith to take advantage of this fluidity to make her point in each case.

Before turning to Smith's novels, artistic education will be contextualized in terms of the restrictions recommended on the basis of gender and class. The gendering of 'female accomplishments' will be considered by charting the shift from viewing amateur drawing as a 'gentlemanly' pursuit to it being satirized as a skill taught to social-climbing young ladies looking to attract a rich husband.

## Education, Class, & Female Accomplishment

Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, Hannah Woolley boldly exclaimed: ‘though Nature hath differ’d mankind into Sexes, yet she never intended any great difference in their Intellect.’<sup>20</sup> Woolley felt that women’s education had been neglected for too long, and had set about compiling her compendious *Gentlewoman’s Companion* (1673) with the aim of providing guidance for women of every stage and condition in life. However, conduct advice published throughout the period comes with a class proviso, and in Woolley’s work there is an emphasis on ‘gentlewomen’ when it comes to the cultivation of the arts.<sup>21</sup> P.J. Miller’s study of women’s education in the late-eighteenth century reveals the deep-seated anxiety surrounding social mobility running counter to the desire for national improvement: ‘despite the period’s widespread acceptance of the inevitability and desirability of change, it resolutely clung to what was believed to be a providentially ordered social structure based upon rank and due subordination.’<sup>22</sup> James Nelson’s *An Essay on the Government of Children* (1753) is a text especially explicit and specific in its class divides, separating out: (1) the nobility; (2) the gentry; (3) the genteel trades; (4) the common trades; and (5) the peasantry on the grounds that: ‘’Tis a fine thing to be a Scholar! True, it is so: but surely it is a sad thing to be a learned Beggar.’<sup>23</sup> Clara Reeve’s *Plans of Education* (1792) splits society into seven orders, but records the difficulty of maintaining clear class distinctions: ‘within every one of these orders of men, there is a graduation of property that raises the first step of it nearly to an equality with the next above it and this increases the difficulty of keeping them within their

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<sup>20</sup> Hannah Woolley, *Gentlewoman’s Companion; Or, a Guide to the Female Sex* (London: A. Maxwell for Dorman Newman, 1673), p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Woolley, *Gentlewoman’s Companion*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>22</sup> P.J. Miller, ‘Women’s Education, ‘Self-Improvement’ and Social Mobility – A Late Eighteenth Century Debate’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 20.3 (October 1972), 302-14 (p. 302).

<sup>23</sup> James Nelson, *An Essay on the Government of Children, Under Three Heads: VIZ, Health, Manners and Education* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1753), p. 299.

proper bounds.’<sup>24</sup> Control of the access to artistic education was one means of observing rank. Ornamental accomplishments, such as music, are reserved for the nobility and gentry, and are seen as being less useful further down the ranks. The lower orders only need to be educated according to their domestic situation, not leisure. This message is reinforced by Priscilla Wakefield in her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798), in which she states that daughters of tradesmen ‘should not only be prohibited from learning the ornamental arts, such as music, dancing, drawing, foreign languages, and costly works of taste’, but ‘they should never be placed at a school where those arts are taught; for it is a natural propensity of the human mind, to prefer that which is beautiful and pleasant, to those things which though useful are unadorned.’ She proposes that schools ‘not aiming at gentility’ ought to be established that girls might be educated according to their class and make them useful for their station in life rather than be corrupted by indulgences.<sup>25</sup> As seen in Sarah Scott’s *History of Sir George Ellison*, discussed in Chapter One, drawing and music are not taught to the lower orders for this very reason.

Status is of paramount importance when it comes to what skills women are taught, and this message is reinforced in didactic collections of poems, stories, and biographies delineating virtue and vice. For example, ‘The History of Melinda’ in the didactic collection *The Portrait of Life* (1770) promotes a similar message, warning of the dangers of educating a woman beyond her station in life. Melinda’s accomplishments make her a desirable companion for her rich friends even if she lacks their wealth, but she neglects her own family and is subsequently left with no money or support. Once abandoned by her friends, millinery

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<sup>24</sup> Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education: With Remarks on the System of Other Writers* (London: T. Hookham & J. Carpenter, 1792), p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, pp. 58-59.

is described as the only option she has.<sup>26</sup> If accomplishments fail to breach social barriers by enabling a woman to secure an advantageous marriage, a woman risks being left unsuited for her situation in life. Whilst there is a practical moral message behind class-based education, the issue of attracting a husband remains an issue.

Long before Mary Wollstonecraft's lament on the state of female education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Sarah Chapone was voicing her concerns regarding the acquisition of accomplishments with the sole aim of attracting the notice of the opposite sex. In *The Hardships of the English Laws in relation to Wives* (1735) she acknowledges that accomplishments are recommended to women as 'the surest Means of obtaining the Love and Admiration of the Men, and procuring an advantageous Settlement in Marriage.' With this 'proposed to them, as their highest Advancement, and End and Design of all their Attainments', Chapone then asks: 'Can any one suppose that a young Creature thus disciplined, should ever take it into her Head, that her truest Happiness, as well as greatest Honour, should arise from the Service of God, and free Exertion of her own Soul?'<sup>27</sup> An education founded on accomplishments could all too easily cultivate an appearance of virtue whilst fostering vanity. As Lady Sarah Pennington cautions in *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761): 'vice hides her deformity with the borrowed garb of virtue.'<sup>28</sup> The likes of Pennington, Chapone, and Hannah More worry that such a vain pursuit of accomplishment would lead young women away from religion. In the previous chapter it was noted that artistic accomplishments are not criticized by Sarah Scott within the confines of Millenium Hall. Removed from the sexualized male gaze,

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<sup>26</sup> Anon, 'Friendship Prostituted; Or, The History of Melinda', in *The Portrait of Life, Or The Various Effects of Virtue and Vice Delineated; As they appear in the great Theatre of the World. In a Collection of Interesting Novels*, Vol. 2 of 2 (London: John Bell; York: C. Etherington, 1770), pp. 31-44.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of the English Laws in relation to Wives* (London: Printed by W. Bowyer for J. Roberts, 1735), p. 43-44.

<sup>28</sup> Lady Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters*, in *The Young Lady's Parental Monitor* (London: printed for Joseph Wenman, 1790), p. 60.

accomplishments can be cultivated as useful pastimes with a benefit for the community as a whole. The women are not seeking male attention, and religion remains most important to them. However, the concern that accomplishments will lead faith to be neglected lasts well into the nineteenth century, with a concerned mother writing to *La Belle Assemblée* (1822) about the deficiencies of boarding school education for girls:

To render women superficial triflers is, in nine cases out of ten, the aim, or at least the *end* of boarding-school education. [...] I wish to wage no war with fashionable accomplishments: they are great embellishers of life, but I am sorry to see them weighed against the *essentials* of education; and when vanity holds the scales, there is little question on which side she will turn the balance. Hence mothers will rather see their daughters good dancers than good arithmeticians, or in fact, arithmeticians at all.<sup>29</sup>

The solution proposed was to implement a programme of education with a foundation of religion and morality. This would be followed by reading, reflection, and arithmetic, and only when the girls have achieved understanding in these areas would the elegant accomplishments of letter writing and conversation be taught. In his highly influential *Sermons for Young Women* (1766), James Fordyce advised women to acquire a combination of ‘Domestic, Elegant, and Intellectual’ accomplishments which would be of use throughout their lives and combat the evils of ‘vacancy of thought and want of occupation’.<sup>30</sup> Reprinted numerous times into the nineteenth century,<sup>31</sup> Fordyce’s influence on women’s education is emphasized in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* when she notes that ‘Dr Fordyce’s sermons have long been part of a young woman’s library’.<sup>32</sup> However, Wollstonecraft loathes the portrait of an angel he promotes, describing his ideal thus:

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<sup>29</sup> Anon. ‘Female Accomplishments’, *La Belle Assemblée: or Court and Fashionable Magazine*, March 1822 (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1822), pp. 121-22.

<sup>30</sup> James Fordyce, *Sermons for Young Women*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol 1 of 2 (London: printed for A. Miller and T. Cadell, 1766), p. 210.

<sup>31</sup> Reprinted fourteen times before 1814.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 166.

Never, perhaps, does a fine woman strike more deeply, than when, composed into pious recollection, and possessed with the noblest considerations, she assumes, without knowing it, superiour dignity and new graces; so that the beauties of holiness seem to radiate about her, and the by-standers are almost induced to fancy her already worshipping amongst her kindred angels!<sup>33</sup>

This image brings to mind Maria Cosway's virtuous artist, but the focus is entirely on the effect the woman has upon the beholder. Wollstonecraft duly laments: 'Why are women to be thus bred up with a desire of conquest?'<sup>34</sup> Campaigning for increased opportunities for women to work, Sophia Agnes Semple similarly critiques Fordyce's advice: 'he is perpetually recommending to them to acquire, or practise, this or that grace or virtue, because it will render them objects of attraction to the other sex.'<sup>35</sup> With Fordyce's *Sermons* read aloud by the odious Mr Collins to a less than enthusiastic audience of Bennet girls in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen highlights that his work was subject to ridicule.

Nevertheless, debate continued to rage surrounding exactly which accomplishments should be taught and what level of proficiency should be attained, and Amanda Vickery has emphasized the incoherence in advice, noting that there was 'no unanimity even on what counted as an accomplishment, let alone whether they should be promoted, tolerated or banned'.<sup>36</sup> Little wonder an anonymous male writer felt compelled to ask 'What are the proper accomplishments?' in his article 'On Female Accomplishments' to be published in *The Edinburgh Magazine* (1781):

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<sup>33</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, pp.168-69.

<sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 169.

<sup>35</sup> Sophia Agnes Semple, *Thoughts on Education; in two parts: the first on general education, and the second on that of females* (London: T. Bayley, 1812), p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'The Theory and Practice of Female Accomplishment', in *Mrs Delany and Her Circle*, ed. by Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 94-109 (pp. 106-07).

[...] we may admire her abilities or application, and be delighted with the productions of her genius, but, as a woman, she is lost; she ceases to be amiable, by becoming too estimable: yet there are certain studies, such as poetry, civil and natural history, and works of taste and eloquence, which are I think rather too much neglected by the fair, but which, if not carried too far, would be, in many respects, useful and ornamental to them.<sup>37</sup>

A woman could be criticized for acquiring too much or too little skill depending on the illusive ideal standard of what it means to be an accomplished female. As Erasmus Darwin stated in his *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (1797): ‘The female character should possess the mild and retiring virtues rather than the bold and dazzling ones; great eminence in almost any thing is sometimes injurious to a young lady.’<sup>38</sup> Whilst being judged to lack accomplishment could see a young woman left behind in the marriage stakes, displaying too much knowledge could risk her losing her femininity and social standing as a member of the leisured classes. Whether a gentleman or a lady, some degree of lack is desirable when differentiating the aristocratic, amateur artist from the professional who needs to earn a living from their art.

### **Drawing as a Gentlemanly Pursuit**

Despite the prominence of drawing on lists of desirable, if not essential, accomplishments required of young ladies, amateur artistic pursuits have never been the sole preserve of either sex. The discourse of female accomplishment to emerge in conduct material published during the eighteenth century promotes the polite arts as suitably feminine pastimes, by which women would appear to advantage whilst working to ornament the home, entertain their family, impress company, and most importantly, attract a husband. However, art historians

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<sup>37</sup> Anon, ‘On Female Accomplishments’, *The Edinburgh Magazine; Or, Literary Amusement*, Vol. 53: 9 August 1781 (Edinburgh: Walter Ruddiman, 1781), pp. 142-43.

<sup>38</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (Derby: printed by J. Drewry for J. Johnson, 1797), p. 10.

including Ann Bermingham and Kim Sloan have charted the cultural history of drawing from Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* or *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), which promotes the ability to draw as a gentlemanly pursuit, before considering how drawing is gendered as a female accomplishment during the eighteenth century. The first conduct books to be published in English focused on the attributes of the gentleman courtier, influenced by Baldassare Castiglione's, *Il Cortegiano*. Castiglione was himself a courtier and a soldier who had been educated in the humanist tradition. With his schooling in the liberal arts combined with military experience, Castiglione had practical reasons to recommend drawing and painting as skills required of gentlemen:

In fact, from painting, which is in itself a most worthy and noble art, many useful skills can be derived, and not least for military purposes: thus a knowledge of the art gives one the facility to sketch towns, rivers, bridges, citadels, fortresses and similar things, which otherwise cannot be shown to others even if, with a great deal of effort, the details are memorized.<sup>39</sup>

No question, drawing could prove useful, not least of all for sketching out military maps, but Castiglione had to defend the status of drawing as a noble, gentlemanly pursuit, as opposed to a mechanical art practiced by the artisan class. To do this he appealed to antiquity:

For I recall having read that in the ancient world, and in Greece especially, children of gentle birth were required to learn painting in school, as a worthy and necessary accomplishment, and it was ranked among the foremost of the liberal arts.<sup>40</sup>

Key to Castiglione's picture of the ideal courtier is the concept of *Sprezzatura*, which can be translated as a kind of nonchalance. Drawing remained noble so long as it seemed effortless, thus exonerating the gentleman artist from the labour and exertion required of the professional artist.

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<sup>39</sup> Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by George Bull (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, pp. 96-97.

*Il Cortegiano* proved to be a highly influential text across Europe. In England, Sir Thomas Elyot's *Boke Named the Governour* (1531)<sup>41</sup> was heavily influenced by Castiglione, and was followed by Sir Thomas Hoby's English translation of *Il Cortegiano* in 1561.<sup>42</sup> Henry Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman* (1634) also draws on Castiglione's text, extending the use of drawing beyond military map-making to include the documentation of the flora and fauna encountered when travelling in foreign climes. Imitation, it is stated, has the potential to foster an appreciation of God's creation and increase knowledge of the natural world.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) recommended drawing as a means to combat boredom and keep melancholy at bay.<sup>44</sup> However, extensive study could have the opposite effect, fuelling the association between the artist and the melancholic temperament.<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that Castiglione did not limit drawing as a skill only to be acquired by men of the court, proposing that the female counterpart to the courtier should share in his interests so that they would be able to converse. Nicholas Hilliard's *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* (c. 1600), like *Il Cortegiano*, was aimed at an aristocratic audience and recommended limning as a gentlemanly pastime, as they could work at their leisure and put their art aside whenever duty called. *Limning*, a term originally meaning to paint a picture or

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governour* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970).

<sup>42</sup> Sir Thomas Hoby (trans.), *The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio: Deuided into Foure Bookes, Very Necessarie and Profitable for Yong Gentlemen & Gentlewomen Abyding in Court, Palace or Place, Done into English by Thomas Hoby* (London: Henry Denham, 1577).

<sup>43</sup> Henry Peacham, *Peacham's Compleat gentleman, 1634, With an Introduction by G. S. Gordon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Printed by John Lichfield and James Short, for Henry Cripps, 1621).

<sup>45</sup> As a consequence, women were advised to avoid the arts, being less physiologically capable of handling the excess of black bile which was thought to cause melancholy. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) does include a chapter on maids, widows, and nuns, but this serves to reinforce the idea that female melancholy is associated with lovesickness, a lack of sex, or the menstrual cycle. As Christine Battersby explains in her study of gender and genius: 'The man of great *ingenium*' meaning a man of skill, judgement or talent 'had enough natural heat to counteract the coldness and dryness of the residual bile' thought to cause melancholy, whereas the naturally cold Aristotelian woman 'could suffer the pathological disease of melancholy, but were unlikely to experience its more glorious side-effects.' Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 31-32.

a portrait with its roots in the illumination of manuscripts, specialized into a term for the painting of miniatures. Women could themselves learn to limn from the gentlemen of the court, meaning that they did not have to associate with the artisan class for instruction. However, in her historical survey of amateur art, Kim Sloan records that by the mid-seventeenth century Castiglione's influence had spread beyond the 'princely minds' of the court his text had originally been intended for, being taken up 'by members of the landed gentry or the sons and daughters of the first generation of the 'professional' civil servants who had acquired titles, land or wealth by serving at court'.<sup>46</sup> Limning is one of the suitable pastimes recommended by Hannah Woolley, who describes it as 'an excellent qualification for a Gentlewoman to exercise and please her fancy.'<sup>47</sup> Woolley goes on to observe that there are 'many foreign Ladies that are excellent Artists', and adds that, 'neither are there wanting Examples enough in his Majesty's three Kingdoms of such Gentlewomen whose indefatigable industry in this laudable and ingenious Art may run parallel with such as make it their profession.'<sup>48</sup> Woolley recognises the skill possessed by women artists at home and abroad, but despite her observation that many women have talent equal to that of professional artists, it is telling that her focus here is on limning for leisure; gentlewomen would not be forced to challenge their status by attempting to earn a living from the arts. Sloan charts the 'change of focus' from considering limning as a refined, gentlemanly pastime, to being seen as 'merely one of many accomplishments practised mainly by women' as something reflected in drawing manuals.<sup>49</sup> However, Sloan suggests that 'it would be a mistake to generalize about the polarization of the activity of painting miniatures and to see 'limning' confined to female amateurs for the rest of the eighteenth century',<sup>50</sup> arguing that it is symptomatic of the

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<sup>46</sup> Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters, c. 1600-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Woolley, *Gentlewoman's Companion*, p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Woolley, *Gentlewoman's Companion*, p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> Sloan, *A Noble Art*, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> Sloan, *A Noble Art*, p. 43.

fact that the public works of men have taken precedence over their private activities.<sup>51</sup> Men were still drawing and painting in an amateur capacity, but it was not recorded as an important activity.

As with the term ‘Bluestocking’, to be characterized as ‘accomplished’ came to be seen as something negative when associated with a particular type of woman. In the case of the accomplished female, that is a woman who is artfully seeking to attract a socially advantageous match rather than to develop a true talent, as seen in Cosway’s *Progress of Female Dissipation*. Ann Bermingham notes that post-1793 criticism of accomplishment becomes particularly anti-Jacobin in tone.<sup>52</sup> For example, caricatures, such as James Gillray’s *Farmer Giles and his Wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their neighbours on her return from School* (1809),<sup>53</sup> illustrate the anxiety surrounding the potential for accomplishment to drive social mobility. In this print, Gillray responds to the stock character of the accomplished female by subverting the convivial group dynamic of the conversation piece and depicting a family of inflated consumers growing too big for their station in society.

However, the term accomplishment is not restricted to negative social commentary. The Porter sisters continue to use the term ‘accomplished’ to describe the military heroes of their novels.<sup>54</sup> Drawing remains a hallmark of the soldier who is refined company in the drawing rooms of polite society, whilst also an adept tactician on the battlefield. However, connoisseurship and virtuosity are seen as the pursuits of a gentleman of leisure, as opposed to drawing. Sloan suggests that this reflects the conceptual split that women create, and men judge. Sloan defines the virtuoso as having a little knowledge of many things:

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<sup>51</sup> Sloan, *A Noble Art*, p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> Given that this caricature ridicules the pursuit of accomplishment when social gatekeeping bars Betty from ever being considered a truly accomplished female, it will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter in relation to Charlotte Smith’s *The Old Manor House*.

<sup>54</sup> See Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), and Anna Maria Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807). The topic of art in *The Hungarian Brothers* will be developed in Chapter Four of this thesis, in relation to women sculptors.

*Virtuosi* were, by definition, involved in acquiring knowledge in too many areas to make them the masters of any one. In addition, as soon as they applied themselves to the refinement and exploration of one artistic technique, they were in danger of losing their status as gentlemen.<sup>55</sup>

Similar to the accomplished female, the virtuoso and the connoisseur could be ridiculed for acquiring too little skill in too many areas. However, only the professional artist should seek to specialize, having toiled to perfect their talent. Taken as counterparts, the accomplished female aims to attract the objectifying gaze of the male connoisseur.

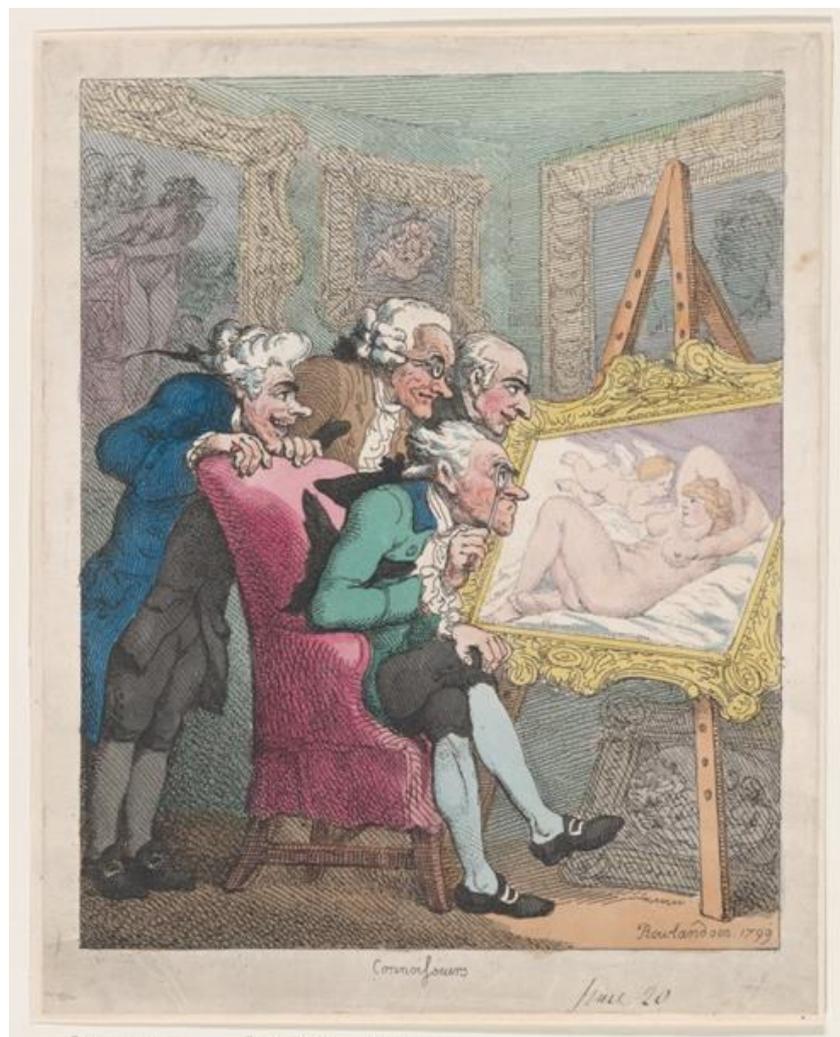


Figure 2.3: Thomas Rowlandson, *Connoisseurs* (20 June 1799), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Accession Number: 59.533.644, Public Domain Dedication CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0).

<sup>55</sup> Sloan, *A Noble Art*, p. 15.

Associated with sexual excesses of the Grand Tour, whether in the pursuit of carnal experiences or erotically-charged art, connoisseurship and virtuosity effectively give academic license to a sexualized male gaze. As noted by John Brewer: ‘The very study of *virtu* was tainted with sex.’<sup>56</sup> Thomas Rowlandson’s caricature, *The Connoisseurs* (1799), highlights the sexual implications of the connoisseur’s objectifying gaze as a group of elderly men leer over a painting of Venus and Cupid. In doing so, they mimic the image of Susanna and the Elders displayed on the wall behind them.<sup>57</sup>

According to Jonathan Richardson’s *The Science of a Connoisseur* (1719), a disinterested view should serve to protect the connoisseur from bias:

To be a connoisseur a man must be as free from all kinds of prejudice as possible; he must moreover have a clear and exact way of thinking and reasoning; he must know how to take in, and manage just ideas; and throughout he must have not only a solid, but unbiased judgement.<sup>58</sup>

However, false connoisseurship can serve to mask vice or lead a viewer to make incorrect assumptions. Charlotte Smith interrogates both connoisseurship and accomplishment in her novels. In *Emmeline*, for example, wrong judgements are made by the connoisseur, Lord Delamere, as a consequence of viewing women’s art as a female accomplishment designed to convey romantic interest.

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<sup>56</sup> John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 262.

<sup>57</sup> Susanna and the Elders: this apocryphal addition to the book of Daniel (Ch. 13) describes how two elderly voyeurs spy on Susanna, a fair and virtuous Hebrew wife, whilst she is bathing in her private garden. Overcome with lust, they accost her to demand that she has sex with them, stating that if she refuses them they will accuse her of having been in the garden to meet a lover. Susanna stands her ground, and her innocence is proven when the two men present contradictory accounts of what they have seen. The story has been represented in art by the likes of Guido Reni, Rubens, Van Dyck, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, and Artemisia Gentileschi.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Richardson, *The Science of a Connoisseur* in *The Works of Jonathan Richardson* (London: T. & J. Edgerton, 1792), p. 199.

### The Misinterpretation of Art in *Emmeline*

Charlotte Smith's first novel, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788) follows the eponymous heroine as she is relentlessly pursued by her cousin, Lord Delamere, who seeks to marry Emmeline against his parents' wishes. With Emmeline believed to be the illegitimate daughter of his late brother, Lord Montreville does not consider his penniless, orphaned niece to be a suitable match for his son. Up until the time Montreville and Delamere arrive at Mowbray Castle with the view of improving their neglected estate, Emmeline has been left solely in the care of the old housekeeper, Mrs. Carey, and the steward, Mr. Williamson. Lacking the ability to educate their young ward beyond reading, writing, and accounting, she 'comprehended everything with a facility that soon left her instructors behind her'.<sup>59</sup> Emmeline is described as having 'a kind of intuitive knowledge',<sup>60</sup> and will venture to the abandoned wing of the castle, crossing broken floorboards, to retrieve the works of Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare, and Pope from amongst the rotting volumes that fill the shelves of the dilapidated library in order to further her education:

Sensible of the defects of her education, she applied incessantly to her books; for of every useful and ornamental feminine employment she had long since made herself mistress without any instruction.

She endeavoured to cultivate a genius for drawing, which she had inherited from her father; but for want of knowing a few general rules, what she produced had more elegance and neatness than correctness and knowledge.

She knew nothing of the science of music; but her voice was soft and sweet, and her ear exquisite. The simple songs, therefore, she had acquired by it, she sung with a pathos which made more impression on her hearers than those studied graces learned by long application, which excite wonder rather than pleasure.<sup>61</sup>

In terms of artistic accomplishments, Emmeline's natural talent for music and drawing allows her to convey more feeling in her productions than would be achieved by more studied

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<sup>59</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle, The Works of Charlotte Smith*, Vol. 2. ed. by Judith Stanton (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2016), p.4.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 40.

application of the rules. Consequently, something as ephemeral as song is capable of leaving a lasting impression upon her audience. Whilst Emmeline may have also inherited a natural talent for drawing from her father, this is useless compared to the property rights she is legally entitled to inherit, which would secure her future independence.

Although Emmeline is ‘sensible of the defects of her education’ she does not fail to attract the attention of Delamere, who sees her as an object to be possessed along with the castle. Aping the language of the great landscape improver, Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown,<sup>62</sup> Delamere professes: ‘I already begin to see great capabilities about this venerable mansion. I think I shall take to it, as my father offers it me; especially as I suppose Miss Emmeline is to be included in the inventory’.<sup>63</sup> Emmeline’s artistic performances contribute to this view of her, with the commodification of accomplishments making artistic skill something to be acquired for its exchange value in the marriage market. Delamere professes that he does not want an affected, ‘over-educated puppet’ like Miss Devereux for a wife, preferring instead the ‘native elegance’ of Emmeline.<sup>64</sup> The difference he perceives is that Emmeline’s artwork is a product of her true love for him, rather than something knowingly cultivated to give the appearance of a romantic attachment for social advancement. In Delamere’s eyes the female artist only paints or draws as a means of revealing romantic interest, whether genuine or affected.

Emmeline is described as a talented, if untutored, artist who goes on to produce miniature portraits of both her cousin, Lord Delamere, and her friend, Adelina Trelawney. Given that a miniature portrait can be held, kissed, and carried close to the heart, it is readily understood to be representative of familial ties or a romantic attachment. What’s more, there

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<sup>62</sup> Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (c. 1716-1783) was a celebrated landscape gardener who championed a naturalistic, Arcadian style over formal gardens. He earned the nickname ‘Capability’ from his propensity to tell his wealthy clients that their estates had great ‘capabilities’ for improvement.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 39.

is a sense of immediacy and intimacy to sketching a likeness that suggests art can express what cannot be articulated through speech. However, in *Emmeline*, Smith highlights the portrait as a site of confusion, rather than a means of conveying unspoken truths. This confusion stems from the limited view of seeing women's art as a female accomplishment, designed merely to attract male attention and make a declaration of love. Although Smith is careful to separate genuine artistic talents from empty accomplishments, she acknowledges the difficulty of combatting the male gaze as Delamere is unable to view women's art as the product of anything but love. This is especially the case for portrait miniatures.

The ability to paint in miniature came to be considered a particularly feminine skill because of the delicacy required. Furthermore, it was also thought to be a suitable pursuit for young ladies because it is a relatively clean and tidy art form that does not require physical exertion. However, in *Emile; or, On Education* (1762) Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes that girls should not be encouraged to paint portraits, limiting their artistic education to copying out patterns for the ornamentation of dress:

I would not have them apply themselves to landskips, much less to portrait painting. It is sufficient for them to design foliages, fruits, flowers, drapery, and whatever is capable of giving embellishment to dress, and to draw a pattern of embroidery after their own fancy, when they cannot meet with one to their liking.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst girls should be kept busy, it is important that their pastimes have a practical use. John Burton quotes Rousseau's advice in his *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (1793), adding that this type of activity 'may prevent you from misemploying your leisure hours'.<sup>66</sup> Portraiture was to be avoided because paying too much attention to a man's face risked revealing, or fostering, a romantic attachment. In Nicholas Hilliard's *A Treatise Concerning*

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<sup>65</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius, Or, An Essay on Education*, trans. by Thomas Nugent, Vol. 2 of 2 (London: J. Nourse & P. Vaillant, 1763), p. 195. Promoting a gender distinction between the sexes, Book Five includes advice specifically on female education as Rousseau describes Sophie as his ideal companion for Emile. The focus is on practical use of the arts.

<sup>66</sup> John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (Rochester: John Murray, 1793), p. 135.

*the Arte of Limning* (c. 1600), the court miniaturist to Elizabeth I describes falling in love with the sitter as an occupational hazard the artist faces when painting a portrait:

We are all generally commanded to turn away our eyes from beauty of human shape, lest it should inflame the mind. How then can the curious drawer watch, and as it were catch those lovely graces, witty smilings, and those stolen glances which suddenly like lightening pass, and another countenance taketh place, except to behold and very well note and conceit to like? So that he can hardly take them truly, and without blasting his young and simple heart.<sup>67</sup>

Hilliard presents painting as a seduction. The artist is at great risk from observing the charms of the sitter, but he must chase after those *stolen glances* in order to produce a good likeness. Furthermore, the popular story of the Corinthian Maid particularly associates women's art as something inspired by love.

The classical mythology surrounding the origins of drawing clearly associates the production of art with love. In Book 35 of his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder describes how the Corinthian Maid traces her lover's resemblance from the shadow he casts against a wall so that she would be able to dwell on his image during his absence away at war:

She was in love with a youth, and when he was leaving the country she traced the outline of the shadow which his face cast on the wall by lamplight. Her father filled the outline with clay and made a model; this dried and baked with the rest of his pottery.<sup>68</sup>

Images of the Corinthian Maid were particularly popular during the late-eighteenth century, with Alexander Runciman, David Allen, Joseph Wright, and Jean-Baptiste Regnault all producing their own artistic responses to the story during the 1770s and 1780s.<sup>69</sup> Robert Rosenblum has surveyed the many paintings, engravings and bas-reliefs to feature the

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Hilliard, *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* (Ashington: Mid Northumberland Arts Group, 1981), p.77.

<sup>68</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Pliny's Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, Vol. 9 of 10 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1961), Book 35, pp. 259-412 (p. 371-73).

<sup>69</sup> Robert Rosenblum, 'The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism', *The Art Bulletin*, 39.4 (December 1957), 279-90.

Corinthian Maid produced from the late-seventeenth century onwards, and suggests that the sentimentality of the eighteenth century and the acceptance of women artists, such as Angelica Kauffman and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, account for its particular popularity during the period.



**Figure 2.4:** Anon after Francesco Bartolozzi, *The origin of Painting*, stipple engraving used for fan-mount, extended and coloured by hand (1 August 1786), published in London by A. Poggi, V&A, London, Museum No. E.538-1950, image © V&A.

Frances Muecke’s research highlights the increased focus on love in the story, with some depictions featuring Cupid guiding the maid’s hand, following a mistranslation of Pliny in Franciscus Janius’s *De picture verterum libri tres* (1637). She notes that: ‘Junius has introduced the personification of Love by rewriting Pliny’s “capita amore iuvenis”, in love

with a youth, as “amore suadente,” taught by Love.’<sup>70</sup> Cupid’s guiding hand may diminish the maid’s agency in images such as the engraving for a fan-mount after Francesco Bartolozzi (1786), pictured overleaf, but even without the Rococo addition of Love personified, the driving motivation behind the tracing of the shadow remains the maid’s love for the youth.

In his *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages*, translated into English in 1793, Antoine Léonard Thomas suggests that love is the only passion women are capable of feeling and expressing:

Love is without dispute the passion which the women feel the strongest, and which they express the best. They feel the other passions more feebly, and by rebound: but love is their own; it is the charm and the business of their life; it is their soul, they should therefore know well how to paint it.<sup>71</sup>

He goes on to describe how women are limited in terms of their creative capacity by comparing the female imagination to a mirror ‘which reflects fairly [...], but creates nothing’.<sup>72</sup> If Thomas is to be believed, women artists would only be able to produce unimaginative copies. On one level the story of the Corinthian Maid contradicts this message by privileging a woman’s foundational role in the origins of art, but she only produces a mechanical response by tracing out a copy. It is her father, the potter Butades, who goes on to mould a bust from the outline. However, it should be noted that the images aforementioned constitute a male view of the female artist. A woman artist to engage with the myth of the Corinthian Maid is Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, who includes a shadow of her hand in her *Self-Portrait* (1790).

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<sup>70</sup> Frances Muecke, “‘Taught by Love’: The Origin of Painting Again, *The Art Bulletin*, 81.2 (June 1999), 297-302 (p. 299).

<sup>71</sup> Antoine Léonard Thomas, *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages*, *Enlarged from the French of M. Thomas by Mr. Russell*, Vol. 2 (London: Printed for G, Robinson, 1793), pp. 9-10.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas, *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages*, p. 10.



Figure 2.5: Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait* (1790), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Accession No. 1905 (Wikimedia Commons).

Mary D. Sheriff argues that the reference to the origins of art made in Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun's *Self-portrait* (1790) can be read 'oppositionally', with the shadow of the artist's hand constituting a 'subversive citation', alluding to the story of the Corinthian Maid, but in a way that reclaims what was deemed a mechanical process as a creative act.<sup>73</sup> Sheriff notes that although Vigée Le Brun's shadow is present, she isn't tracing it: 'The work thwarts any suggestion that the woman artist merely copies, for projected on the canvas pictured in Vigée Le Brun's self-portrait is a distinct shadow, which she does not trace, and the tracing of a

<sup>73</sup> Mary D. Sheriff, 'Letters: Painted / Penned / Purloined', *Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 26 (1998), 29-56 (p. 38).

memory that she cannot see'.<sup>74</sup> Vigée Le Brun is in the process of painting a portrait of Marie Antoinette from memory. What's more, she is pro-actively producing an image of how she wants to be seen as an artist, not dwelling on a lover.

In *Emmeline* Charlotte Smith shows the influence of the Corinthian Maid through Delamere's inability to view his portrait as the product of anything but love. Confusion then stems from the two-way misunderstanding of the social signification of female artistic endeavour, with Delamere continually judging Emmeline's artistic output solely in relation to what it reveals about her feelings towards him, as when he misreads the tableau created from her discarded materials. However, Smith not only shows the error of this, but raises the status of women's art by presenting Emmeline's artwork as the creative product of memory, as opposed to a copy or trace:

Her music book lay open on a piano forte in the breakfast parlour. A song which he had a few days before desired her to learn, as being one which particularly charmed him, seemed to have been just copied into it, and he fancied that the notes and the writing were executed with more than her usual elegance. Under it was a little porte feuille of red morocco. Delamere took it up. It was untied; and two or three small tinted drawings fell out. He saw the likeness of Mrs Stafford, done from memory; and yet one more striking of his sister Augusta; and two or three unfinished resemblances of persons he did not know, touched with less spirit than the other two. A piece of silver paper doubled together enclosed another; he opened it – it was a drawing of himself, done with a pencil, and slightly tinged with a crayon; strikingly like; but it seemed unfinished, and somewhat effaced.

Though among so many other portraits, this could not be considered as a very flattering distinction, Delamere, on seeing it, was not master of his transports. He now believed Emmeline (whom he could never induce to own that her partiality for him exceeded the bounds of friendship) yet cherished in her heart a passion she would not avow.<sup>75</sup>

Opening Emmeline's porte feuille violates her personal space, mirroring the pursuit she has previously been subjected to at Mowbray Castle by Delamere and his friend Millefleur, who force their way into her room. If the castle stands for an attempt on her body, the porte feuille

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<sup>74</sup> Sheriff, 'Letters: Painted / Penned / Purloined', p. 41.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 105.

constitutes an attempt on her mind and soul as Delamere tries to interpret the motivation behind the drawings inside. As a consequence of viewing the portraits, Delamere immediately jumps to the conclusion that Emmeline loves him based on social cues that she is not aware she is promoting. As an autodidact, raised in rural isolation, Emmeline does not realize what signals Delamere will receive.<sup>76</sup> The group of drawings shows her paying no special interest beyond practising her skill at capturing the likenesses of the limited group that make her acquaintance. However, the description of Delamere as ‘not master of his transports’ suggests that the association between art and love is so deeply ingrained that he is willing to take anything he finds as a sign of Emmeline’s affection. Drawing a man’s portrait and playing his favourite songs may be the hallmarks of a coquette conveying a preference for a gentleman through the conventions of female accomplishment, but this, of course, is the kind of affectation Delamere claims to despise, and these portraits were not meant to be seen. The mistake that Delamere makes lies in his viewing of Emmeline’s private productions as a means of articulating feelings she will not verbally declare. Although Erasmus Darwin acknowledges that the pencil could be used ‘as a language to express the forms of all visible objects, [...] which can not in words alone be conveyed with sufficient accuracy’,<sup>77</sup> Delamere goes a stage further in interpreting his portrait as illustrative of Emmeline’s love for him. The fact that Delamere’s own portrait is effaced could suggest that she wants to erase him from her life, but he only sees her taking an interest in him.

Delamere has not sat for Emmeline, meaning that she has drawn his likeness either from memory or stolen glances. Whether she relies on the traces of memory to recall the absent Delamere, or she surreptitiously marks her paper in the moments she looks away from

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<sup>76</sup> As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, isolation can serve to protect and empower women, but it can also have a detrimental effect. In Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), Clarence Hervey raises a girl he names Virginia in Rousseauian isolation to educate her into his ideal companion, but damages her reputation in the process when she is assumed that she must be his mistress. See Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. by Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 28.

her subject, Emmeline would effectively be drawing 'blind'. For Derrida, the Corinthian Maid's own drawing records such a moment of blindness because she must look at the wall, not at her subject, as she traces his outline.<sup>78</sup> Derrida's observation in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' that: 'the trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance' is judged by Ann Bermingham to be 'particularly appropriate' to her own discussion of the Corinthian Maid, whose work she describes in terms of absence and lack: 'It is not really a painting or a drawing but, like a footprint, the sign of a lost presence.' Where the bust moulded by her father at least produces an illusion of presence, the Corinthian Maid's trace outline 'has no substance; it is an empty cipher, a project that can only be completed by the maid's own memory of her lover'. With the trace dependent upon the maid, her selfhood is effectively erased once her father fills her outline with clay.<sup>79</sup> Emmeline has produced a fuller portrait than attempted by the Corinthian Maid, but her work remains incomplete. In this case, Emmeline's effacement of Delamere's portrait can be seen as an attempt to reclaim her selfhood and not be defined in terms of her relationship to him.

As a rough sketch, the drawing enables Emmeline to put down her first thoughts on paper. Seeking to define the use of sketches, designs, and cartoons, Giorgio Vasari wrote that: 'Out of the artist's impetuous mood they [sketches] are hastily thrown off, with pen or other drawing instrument or with charcoal, only to test the spirit of that which occurs to him.'<sup>80</sup> Acting on impulse, the impetuous artist may change their mind. The sketch is essentially a private production which gives the artist the time and space to work out what it is they want

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<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Louvre-Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), pp. 48-47.

<sup>79</sup> Ann Bermingham, 'The Origin of Painting and the Ends of Art: Wright of Derby's Corinthian Maid', in *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art, 1700-1850*, ed. by John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 135-66 (p.139).

<sup>80</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari On Technique*, trans. by Louisa S. Maclehorse (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), p. 212.

to convey in a finished work. The importance of drawing as the foundation of history painting is emphasized by a review of the Royal Academy exhibition of 1780, which remarks on ‘the time and study requisite for an artist to qualify himself for the arduous province of history painting, to acquire a ready correctness in drawing.’<sup>81</sup> The success of a finished work thus depends on the artist’s ability to draw out their initial ideas. Deanna Petherbridge, writing on the primacy of drawing, attributes four key characteristics to the sketch: immediacy, intimacy, revelation, and fragmentation.<sup>82</sup> There is the sense that an artist’s initial response can reveal an unspoken, or an as yet unacknowledged truth. However, there is an inherent contradiction in that the sketch’s fragmentary nature means that the picture is incomplete and not fully thought through. The immediacy with which a sketch is produced may give it honesty, but fragmentation makes its interpretation unstable. In Joshua Reynolds’s *Eighth Discourse on Art* (1778), he attributes the pleasure of viewing sketches to the imaginative potential that arises from their being incomplete:

From a slight undetermined drawing, where the ideas of the composition and character are, as I may say, only touched upon, the imagination supplies more than the painter himself, probably, could produce; and we accordingly often find that the finished work disappoints the expectation that was raised from the sketch.<sup>83</sup>

In this way, Delamere lets his imagination take over and fill in the gaps left by Emmeline’s effaced drawing of him. Emmeline has not intended to deceive Delamere.

When art is viewed as an imitation of nature, it is intrinsically linked to the idea of deception. Another story about art we hear from Pliny’s *Natural History* is that of the competition between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Whilst Zeuxis painted grapes so

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<sup>81</sup> Anon, ‘Review of the Royal Academy Exhibition’, *London Courant*, 3 May 1780, quoted in Shelley King, ‘Amelia Opie’s “Maid of Corinth” and the Origins of Art’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37.4: Artistic Interactions (Summer 2004), 629-51 (p.644).

<sup>82</sup> Deanna Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing: An Artist’s View* (London: South Bank Centre, Art Publications, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> Joshua Reynolds, ‘Discourse VIII’ (December 1778), *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by John Burnet (London: Carpenter, 1842), pp. 141- 63 (p. 161).

realistic that birds swooped down to peck at them, Parrhasius deceived Zeuxis himself by painting a curtain which his rival attempted to pull aside.<sup>84</sup> John Stalker and George Parker's *Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing* (1688) suggests that women are particularly suited to the imitative arts because of the deception involved. Whilst describing how the art of producing mezzotints 'betrays us into a mistake' through its appearance to limning, Stalker and Parker present such deception as a seductive womanly wile:

Who can be displeas'd to be so innocently deluded, and enamour'd at the same time: 'Tis female policy at once to ravish and deceive the eyes, and we not only caress the cheat, but are in love with the imposter too. This manner of Painting is lookt upon to be the Womens more peculiar province, and the Ladies are almost the only pretenders.<sup>85</sup>

Delamere does not think that Emmeline wants to tease or delude him, but he does make the mistake of equating women's art with love.

Emmeline's painted miniature of Adelina Trelawney later becomes another piece of art appraised, and misinterpreted, by Delamere. With the eye of a connoisseur he compares what he sees before him to the previous pictures he has viewed as a means of attributing the work to Emmeline:

He took it to a candle; and looking steadily on it, was struck with the lightness of the drawing, which extremely resembled the portraits Emmeline was accustomed to make; tho' this was more highly finished than any he had yet seen of hers.

Without being able to account for his idea, since nothing was more likely than that the drawing of two persons might resemble each other, he looked at the back of the picture, which was of gold; and in the centre a small oval chrystal [sic] contained the words *Em. Mowbray*, in hair, and under it the name of *Adelina Trelawney*. It was indeed a memorial of Emmeline's affection to her friend; and the name was in her own hair; - a circumstance that made it as dear to Godolphin, as the likeness it bore to his sister: and the whole was rendered in his eyes inestimable, by its being painted by herself.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See Pliny the Elder, *Pliny's Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, Vol. 9 of 10 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1961), Book 35, Chapter 36, pp. 259-412.

<sup>85</sup> John Stalker and George Parker, *A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing* (Oxford: Printed for, and sold by the Authors, 1688), p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 296.

Delamere recognizes the handiwork of Emmeline even though it is more complete than any other pieces of her work he has seen before. This idea is confirmed by the inclusion of her name, signed in hair. Many pieces of memorial jewellery and tokens of affection fashionable at the time incorporated hair, and Marcia Pointon likens the hair miniature to the reliquary. Using part of her body, in this case her hair, heightens the strength of the personal dedication. The metonymic portrait-object, with a part standing in for the whole, thus becomes an object of secular devotion or talisman.<sup>87</sup> Given that Emmeline is considered to be illegitimate, inscribing the name *Mowbray* in her hair declares her right to the name, the same as if it had been written in her blood. As Joe Bray suggests: ‘it is the physical properties of the miniature, this time the combination of hair and signature, which have the most impact, signifying for Godolphin the love that Emmeline feels for his family.’<sup>88</sup> The fact that it is in Godolphin’s possession is enough to suggest his feelings for the artist as well as the sitter. As Bray finds in his study of the portrait in fiction of the Romantic period, the exchange of miniatures can frequently cause confusion: ‘it is often not who or what the miniature portrait claims to represent which makes it significant in fiction of this period, but rather how it is circulated and interpreted’.<sup>89</sup> The portrait of Adelina was intended as a private exchange between friends, but Godolphin has claimed it from his sister with the promise that he will not show it to anyone. As an ‘ambulant portrait’, to use Pointon’s terminology, the miniature allows Delamere to piece together Emmeline’s movements since they parted, but as an object its significance also changes with the change in ownership. A romantic attachment between the new owner and the artist is suggested before it has been avowed. Although Emmeline’s art embodies her, she struggles to control the message others will receive from it.

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<sup>87</sup> Marcia Pointon, ‘“Surrounded with Brilliants”: Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England’, *The Art Bulletin*, 83.1 (2001), 48-71 (p.60-61).

<sup>88</sup> Joe Bray, *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> Bray, *The Portrait in Fiction of the Romantic Period*, p. 48.

The value placed on the artist as opposed to the subject is also frequently a cause for confusion. In *Emma* (1815), Austen's heroine mistakenly perceives Mr Elton taking an interest in Harriet from the attention he pays to the portrait Emma has painted of her, when really his affections actually lie with the artist herself. In terms of class, Emma's high status means that she can afford to act on a whim and discard projects once she loses interest. The portraits she has drawn before have all been abandoned at various stages of completion, until she attempts to take Harriet's likeness. Emma does not anticipate that her accomplishment will encourage the likes of Mr Elton. Although she may not see her art as a means of expressing her own desires, she does exploit the potential for the arts to bring couples together as she attempts to match-make Harriet and Elton. Harriet wonders at Emma's not already being married and why she expresses so little intention of ever marrying. Emma already has a household to run, and does not need an increase in fortune or consequence, so when Harriet questions how she will spend her time as an old maid, Emma replies that she sees no reason for change:

Women's usual occupations of the eye and hand and mind will be as open to me then, as they are now; or with no important variation. If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work.<sup>90</sup>

Emma, of course, has the luxury of status which Harriet lacks: 'it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid!'<sup>91</sup> Austen satirizes the trope of the heroine of uncertain origins through Harriet's marriage to the farmer, Robert Martin. Even though Emma believes her friend deserves better, being a pleasant and pretty girl with a boarding school education is not enough given that Harriet is poor and quite possibly illegitimate.

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<sup>90</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 67.

<sup>91</sup> Austen, *Emma*, p. 67.

After four volumes of trials and tribulations, misunderstandings and near misses, Emmeline does get a happy ending when it is revealed that her parents were married when she was born, thus making her the rightful heir to Mowbray Castle. The picture identification of the miniatures of her parents works towards proving Emmeline's legitimacy, but her emotional response to viewing them has long prevented her from reading the relevant documents she inherits alongside them. Whilst art alone can be misinterpreted, in this case the visual and the verbal work together to access the truth. Art does provide Emmeline with an avenue of self-expression and has the potential to convey what cannot be articulated as she attempts to understand her feelings and negotiate her identity in relation to those around her. However, Delamere does not need to seek clues in Emmeline's drawings as she does repeatedly speak out to spurn his advances. The mistake Delamere makes, therefore, lies in his viewing of Emmeline's private artistic productions as a means of articulating the 'passion she would not avow'.<sup>92</sup> Smith not only shows that the scope and value of women's art goes beyond the confines of a courtship ritual, but that a woman should be taken at her word. *Emmeline* is, therefore, a novel which uses women's art to challenge societal expectations.

Upon publication *The Monthly Review* praised Smith, believing 'that the fable is uncommonly interesting; and that the moral is forcible and just.'<sup>93</sup> What's more, *Emmeline* is one of the 'serious novels' Erasmus Darwin recommends as suitable for boarding school girls to read along with *Ethelinde* (1789) and the works of Frances Burney.<sup>94</sup> In his *Biographical Sketch* of Charlotte Smith, Walter Scott remembered reading *Emmeline* with fondness:

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, p. 105.

<sup>93</sup> Anon, 'Mrs Smith's *Emmeline*, A Novel', *The Monthly Review; Or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 79: September 1788 (London: R. Griffiths, 1788), pp. 241-44 (pp. 242-43).

<sup>94</sup> Darwin, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 33.

We remember well the impression made on the public by the appearance of Emmeline, or The Orphan of the Castle, a tale of love and passion, happily conceived, and told in a most interesting manner. It contained a happy mixture of humour, and of bitter satire mingled with pathos, while the characters, both of sentiment and of manners, were sketched with a firmness of pencil, and liveliness of colouring, which belong to the highest branch of fictitious narrative.<sup>95</sup>

Here, Scott raises the status of the prose works Smith wrote for money rather than love by ranking *Emmeline* amongst the best works of fiction. However, he does recall being disappointed by the novel as a young reader. What surprised Scott was the unhappy fate of Lord Delamere, whose death enables Smith to work against convention and allow Emmeline to enter a happy marriage with a man other than her first suitor. Smith, therefore, subverts reader expectations of both marriage and art to convey her message that women should not be coerced into bad matches. Emmeline, a heroine initially considered illegitimate, has her status raised by the end of the novel. Significantly, this is not achieved through a strategic marriage to Delamere, but the recovery of legal documentation proving that she is the rightful heiress to Mowbray Castle in her own right. Marriage is not always a desirable path to rank and status, as further exemplified by the ineffectual marriage of *femme couvert*,<sup>96</sup> Mrs Stafford.

However, Mary Wollstonecraft did not think that Smith presented a moral tale. Writing anonymously in the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft objects to ‘the false expectations these wild scenes excite’, as they ‘tend to debauch the mind, and throw an insipid kind of uniformity over the moderate and rational prospects of life, consequently *adventures* are sought for and created, when duties are neglected, and content despised.’<sup>97</sup> Unusually for a novel of the period, the fallen woman, Adelina, survives a period of mental unrest, and can eventually marry her seducer. For Wollstonecraft, the character of Adelina is

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<sup>95</sup> Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. 4 of 28, p. 60.

<sup>96</sup> *Femme couvert*: a legal term referring to wife’s identity being subsumed under that of her husband upon marriage.

<sup>97</sup> [Mary Wollstonecraft], ‘ART. XIII. *Emmeline: The Orphan of the Castle*’, *The Analytical Review*, or History of Literature, Vol. 1: May-August 1788 (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1788), pp. 327-33 (p.333).

both ‘absurd and dangerous’ because ‘despair is not repentance’.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the injustices Emmeline faces diminish with the happy ending. However, Smith and Wollstonecraft do agree on the superficiality of an education based on acquiring accomplishments. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft laments that an uneducated, empty mind is prone to vanity:

it is the indolence and vanity – the love of pleasure and the love of sway, that will reign paramount in an empty mind. I say empty emphatically, because the education which women now receive scarcely deserves the name. For the little knowledge that they are led to acquire, during the important years of youth, is merely relative to accomplishments; and accomplishments without a bottom, for unless the understanding be cultivated, superficial and monotonous is every grace.<sup>99</sup>

Smith similarly presents female accomplishments as vain and empty pursuits in many of her novels: the excessively communicative Clarinthia Ludford in *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), is all too eager for everyone she meets to know of her accomplishment, declaring: ‘All the time I can spare from my masters and my filigree, I dedicate to reading’.<sup>100</sup> In *Celestina* (1791), Arabella Thorold views accomplishment as a competitive sport and is relieved that her long list of skills, which includes a grasp of ancient and modern languages, painting, and embroidery, should enable her to outshine Celestina. However, this is not the case, as she ‘played on several kinds of instruments mechanically, for she had no ear, and sung in a feigned voice, for nature had denied her a natural one’.<sup>101</sup> Whatever talent Arabella possesses is artificial. Cultivated merely for show, she does not truly master any of her varied pursuits. Smith’s most scathing commentary on female accomplishment can be found in *The Old Manor House* (1793), but once again, she is careful to separate genuine and useful

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<sup>98</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, p. 333.

<sup>99</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 255.

<sup>100</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Ethelinde, or the recluse of the lake (1789)*, *The works of Charlotte Smith*, Vol. 3. ed. by Stuart Curran (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2016), p. 128.

<sup>101</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Celestina (1791)*, *The works of Charlotte Smith*, Vol. 4. ed. by Kristina Straub (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2016), p.101.

artistic talents from empty accomplishments merely designed to attract attention by pairing the virtuous artist heroine, Monimia, with the artfully accomplished Miss Hollybourn. Smith highlights the economic value of the arts, with Monimia able to support herself and her family through her needlework. Exploring a viable avenue for women's work, *The Old Manor House* presents a lower class heroine who is virtuous and productive.

### **Separating Women's Work from Female Accomplishment in *The Old Manor House***

*The Old Manor House* is a 'property romance' centred on the inheritance of Rayland Hall. With the current owner, Mrs Rayland, having remained unmarried, she has no children to inherit from her, meaning that the Hall should pass into the Somerive family upon her death. Mrs Rayland favours the younger son, Orlando, as her heir, making him an attractive prospect for the accomplished heiress, Miss Ann-Jane-Eliza Hollybourn, who is sarcastically described as follows:

To dignify with mental acquirements this epitome of human loveliness, all that education could do had been lavished; masters for drawing, painting, music, French, and dancing, had been assembled around her as soon as she could speak; she learned Latin from her father at a very early period, and could read any easy sentence in Greek; was learned in astronomy, knew something of the mathematics, and, in relief of these more abstruse studies, read Italian and Spanish. Having never heard any thing but her own praises, she really believed herself a miracle of knowledge and accomplishments.<sup>102</sup>

Her parents have taken great care in ensuring that their daughter will be seen as 'the most accomplished woman of her age and country'.<sup>103</sup> However, upon closer inspection her knowledge merely touches on the surface of numerous subjects without truly mastering any of them; her French accent is 'defective', the landscapes she paints are 'very green', and her

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<sup>102</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Janet Todd (London and New York: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1987), p. 180.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 180.

long concertos are performed with the ‘infinite correctness’ of a determined student not possessed of natural talent. The seemingly endless quest to fill the void and become accomplished recalls Ann Bermingham’s ‘trope of lack’. Her many and varied accomplishments do not make up for the lack of beauty discerned by her potential suitors, who do not desire a wife whose education reaches beyond their own understanding:

The gentlemen, however, whom all these elegancies were probably designed to attract, seemed by no means struck with them: some of them, who had approached her on the suggestion of her being an heiress, had declared that her fortune made no amends for her want of beauty; and others had been alarmed by the acquisitions which went so much beyond those they had made themselves. Thus, at six-and-twenty (though the lady and her parents, for some reason of their own, called her no more than twenty-two), Miss Hollybourn was yet unmarried!<sup>104</sup>

Miss Hollybourn’s extensive range of accomplishments transform her into a figure of fun to be laughed at rather than courted, leading the narrator to exclaim in mock surprise the wonder at her not being married, which is, of course, the true aim of her studious application. The lies about her age recall the idea that female artistry is linked to deception, with Smith presenting accomplishment as a performance intended to dupe an eligible bachelor, like Orlando, into a marriage designed to be advantageous for the Hollybourn family.

The mocking tone of Smith’s narrator is echoed in the later verbal portrait of ‘Female Accomplishments’ anonymously written by ‘A Young Cit’ for *The Satirist, or, Monthly Meteor* of July 1812, showing that this image of the accomplished female remains prevalent in critiques surrounding the education of daughters. The writer begins by describing how Mr Mushroom lauds the superior talents of his daughter to a group of assembled gentlemen. The much anticipated arrival of Miss Jezebel Mushroom subsequently proves a disappointment due to her corpulence, not to mention her claw-like feet, yellow teeth, red complexion, and

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<sup>104</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, pp. 180-81.

the prominent wart on the end of her nose. Miss Mushroom's monstrous appearance rules her out from being considered an accomplished female even before she has had a chance to display her talents because she is not considered an attractive mate. Her very name introduces her as a sexually predatory 'Jezebel',<sup>105</sup> whilst 'Mushroom' metaphorically speaks of her inflated proportions. Furthermore, the influence of the accomplished ideal could easily spread like a fungus as girls seek to replicate, or exceed in the accomplishments of their rivals. Accomplishment is as much about appearances as artistic competence, but Miss Mushroom is lacking in skill as well as beauty: she produces bad drawings, plays the wrong notes on the harpsichord and stammers over her pronunciation when speaking French. Building upon Smith's portrait of Miss Hollybourn, the writer goes on with his blazon of imperfections, describing how Miss Mushroom's faults are augmented, not improved, by her pursuit of accomplishment:

With a plain education, adapted to her humble capacity, Miss Jezebel might have passed through life in a great measure unnoticed, as her defects would have been much less prominent than they at present appear, while, by attempting to give those acquirements which give new graces to beauty and elegance, but only aggravate plainness and natural unconquerable vulgarity, they have made the poor girl vain of accomplishments which degrade her.<sup>106</sup>

When the arts serve to heighten rather than disguise deformities, physical appearance becomes a means of instantly recognising a woman's accomplishment, or rather lack of it. Visual cues allow appearance to stand as a marker of accomplishment when a skill such as musical attainment cannot be directly represented. The writer presents a harsh, misogynistic commentary on female lack, but the satire shows the need to consider the education of daughters.

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<sup>105</sup> 'Jezebel', OED: 'Jezebel, the infamous wife of Ahab king of Israel (1 Kings xvi. 31, xix. 1, 2, xxi; 2 Kings ix. 30–37). Used allusively for a wicked, impudent, or abandoned woman (cf. Rev. ii. 20) or for a woman who paints her face' [online]: <<https://www-oed-com.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/101246>> [accessed 20/02/2020].

<sup>106</sup> 'A Young Cit', 'Female Accomplishments', *The Satirist, or, Monthly Meteor*, ed. by William Jerdan, Vol. 11: July 1812 (London: S. Tripper, 1812), pp. 28–36 (p. 35).

Miss Hollybourn, like Miss Mushroom, does not possess natural artistic talent, but has been encouraged by her father to promote a match that will increase the family's social standing. When his daughter fails to impress Orlando, Doctor Hollybourn resorts to claiming Rayland Hall through corruption of his office as executor of Mrs Ryland's estate, rather than through a dynastic marriage. Deirdre Lynch has described how eighteenth-century writers 'wield the image of the disfigured, overloaded body' as a strategy 'to reinforce ostensibly natural proportions between land and money and labour and commodities.'<sup>107</sup> The physical appearance of an accomplished young women can thus provide commentary on her position in society. Given that the term *caricature* has its roots in the idea of excess,<sup>108</sup> the figure of the accomplished female striving to acquire an ever-increasing list of skills is ripe for satire. The inflated appearance of Miss Hollybourn and Miss Mushroom resembles that of Betty Giles in James Gillray's satirical print *Farmer Giles and his Wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their neighbours on her return from School*. This caricature not only shows how gentrification could provide opportunities for young girls like Betty to improve themselves, but illustrates how she remains barred from being considered a truly accomplished female in spite of her boarding school education.

In their *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray* (1851), Thomas Wright and Robert Harding Evans describe this image as: 'A caricature on the pretentious manners of the English farmers, who were now beginning to ape the

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<sup>107</sup> Deirdre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>108</sup> *Caricature*: from the Italian 'Caricare', meaning 'to load'. See Merriam Webster Dictionary definition [online]: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caricature>> [accessed 10/08/20].

aristocracy, and give their children an education calculated for anything but the humble pursuits of their forefathers.’<sup>109</sup>



Figure 2.6: James Gillray, *Farmer Giles and his Wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their neighbours on her return from School* (1809), Lewis Walpole Library, Record No. lwlpr11122, image courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

An article printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1801) had similarly lamented that: ‘Instead of dishing butter, feeding poultry, or curing bacon,’ young ladies ‘are studying dress, attitudes, novels, French and musick, whilst the fine ladies their mothers sit lounging in parlours adorned with the fiddle faddle fancy work of their daughters.’<sup>110</sup> In his *Annals of Agriculture* (1792) Arthur Young comments on the propensity for gentleman farmers to

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Wright and Robert Harding Evans, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray, Comprising a Political and Humorous History of the Latter Part of the Reign of George The Third* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), p. 479.

<sup>110</sup> ‘A Southern Faunist’, ‘Yeomen of the last and of the present generation’, *Gentleman's magazine and Historical Review*, 71.2: July 1801 (London: E. Cave, 1801), pp. 587-89 (p. 589).

educate their children beyond the sphere that they were born into. With the piano becoming a potent symbol of aspiration, he writes:

Sometimes I see a piano forte in a farmer's parlour, which I always wish was burnt; a livery servant is sometimes found, and a post chaise to carry their daughters to assemblies; these ladies are sometimes educated at expensive boarding schools, and the sons often at University to be made parsons. But all these things imply a departure from the line which separates these different orders of beings. Let these things, and all the folly, foppery, expense and anxiety, that belong to them, remain among gentlemen: a wise Gilesie will not envy them.<sup>111</sup>

The fact that Farmer Giles and the Accomplished Female were stock characters before Gillray's print provides a shorthand means of continuing the satirical social commentary. The plump figure sat at the square piano only pleases her ambitious parents, and her appearance suggests that she lacks accomplishment without the need to hear her musical performance. However, Gillray does manage to convey the unpleasant sound through the reaction of a rather downcast looking dog. The fact that a reaction carries a value judgement perhaps illustrates why Gillray uses a dog to provide a more disinterested response, suggesting that Betty really does lack talent, as well as breeding. There is a sense that the family has grown too big for their sphere, and an inflated sense of importance is conveyed by the size of the Gileses in comparison with their guests, and their very small servant who is practically the size of one of Farmer Giles's legs.

The fact that Betty has been away at boarding school aligns Gillray's work with other prints lampooning boarding school education, such as Edward Francis Burney's *An Elegant Establishment for Young Ladies* (c. 1805). Burney depicts the chaos of the schoolroom, with girls taught to focus on dress, dancing, music, and deportment. Masters of dancing and deportment manhandle their charges, teaching the girls how their physical stance can serve to

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<sup>111</sup> Arthur Young, *Annals of Agriculture and other useful arts. Collected and published by Arthur Young, Esq.* Vol. XVII of XXXV (Bury St. Edmund's: Printed for the editor, by J. Rackham, 1792), p. 157.

embody the accomplished ideal, and one pupil apes Emma Hamilton's 'Attitudes'.<sup>112</sup> The consequence of such a superficial education, it is suggested, is elopement. One young girl has succeeded in her aim of securing male attention and is shown escaping out of the window into the arms of her lover.



Figure 2.7: Edward Francis Burney, *An Elegant Establishment for Young Ladies* (c. 1805), V&A, London, Museum No. P.50-1930, image © V&A.

Music is a pursuit particularly associated with marriage and courtship, as not only can it provide the opportunity to attract male attention and for young couples to spend time in close proximity, but it is frequently used as a metaphor for domestic harmony. Leslie Ritchie's research into late-eighteenth-century music illustrates how harmony was 'a term

<sup>112</sup> Combining performance art and life modelling, Emma Hamilton's 'Attitudes' were a series of classically-inspired poses adopted to entertain parties of assembled guests during the period in which her husband, Sir William Hamilton, served as British Envoy to Naples. There will be more on how Emma Hamilton embodied her art later in this chapter, in relation to *Montalbert*.

which then possessed musical and social resonance’, with social and individual harmony occurring when ‘each person occupied his or her correct place in this ‘Vast Chain of Being’’.<sup>113</sup> If social harmony depends on the chain of being, it is worth considering what happens to the aspirational spendthrift Farmer Giles. William Heath takes up the story in a series of prints that shows him in debtors’ prison by Christmas 1829, reading a letter informing him that his daughters have entered the workhouse.



**Figure 2.8:** William Heath, *Farmer Giles's Establishment!!! Christmas 1829* (9 January 1830), Published by T. McLean, 26 Haymarket, London, Lewis Walpole Library, Record No. Iwlpr13467, image courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

*Farmer Giles*, therefore, continues the argument that an education based on accomplishment has negative consequences for society. Seeing the danger in educating a woman beyond her

<sup>113</sup> Leslie Ritchie, *Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England: Social Harmony in Literature and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 1. ‘Chain of Being’ is a quotation Ritchie takes from Alexander Pope’s ‘Essay on Man’ (1733-4). See *The Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. by Andrew Crozier (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), pp. 190-228 (Epistle I, VIII, 5, p. 197).

station in life, Hannah More uses the second chapter of her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* to warn against an excessive cultivation of the arts:

This frenzy of accomplishments, unhappily, is no longer restricted within the usual limits of rank and fortune; the middle orders have caught the contagion, and it rages downward with increasing violence, from the elegantly dressed, but slenderly portioned curate's daughter, to the equally fashionable daughter of the little tradesman, and of the more opulent, but not more judicious farmer. And is it not obvious, that as far as this epidemical mania has spread, this very valuable part of society declines in usefulness, as it rises in its unlucky pretensions to elegance?<sup>114</sup>

Conflating usefulness and virtue, More describes ornamental accomplishment as a contagion infecting the lower orders, as pretensions to elegance prevent them from making a valid contribution to society. Furthermore, despite farmers, like Gillray's Farmer Giles, having the money to pay for the education of their daughters, talent cannot be purchased. This is a message promoted by Charlotte Smith, as her heroines bestowed with natural talent far outshine the characters schooled in displaying their accomplishments. However, Smith displays a more radical outlook than More by allowing for the social mobility of her lowly yet noble heroine, Monimia.

In *The Old Manor House*, Monimia stands as a direct contrast to social-climbing husband-hunters like Miss Hollybourn. Mrs Rayland 'had taken the orphan niece of her old servant Lennard, not with any view of making her a gentlewoman, but to bring her up to get her bread honestly'.<sup>115</sup> Monimia is unusual for a heroine of the period in that, unlike Emmeline, she does not turn out to be a rightful member of the aristocracy. Being taught the practical skills of spinning and sewing, rather than more delicate accomplishments, she is able to support herself, and later her family, when she gains employment from the local linen factory.

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<sup>114</sup> More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 337.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 13.

Given that needlework can be divided into plain work and fancy work, textiles mark a particularly contentious site of debate when it comes to categorizing this accomplishment as useful or ornamental. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft infamously issued a rallying cry against the hours women spend at needlework, arguing that ‘this employment contracts their faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, by confining their thoughts to their persons.’<sup>116</sup> However, not everyone saw the negative side to needlework, and a scholarly re-evaluation of needlework following in the wake of Rozsika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) has seen textile craft recovered from the realms of mental drudgery to be seen as a valid form of self-expression.<sup>117</sup>

Analysing the intermedial discourse surrounding needlework in conduct literature, fiction, and portraiture, Freya Gowrley cites John Aikin and Anna Barbauld’s feminized ‘Choice of Hercules’ narrative, ‘The Female Choice’ (1793), as a counter example to Wollstonecraft to illustrate an alternate view of textiles during the period.<sup>118</sup> In ‘The Female Choice’ needlework represents virtue. When, during a dream, Melissa is visited by two female figures named Dissipation and Housewifery, Dissipation promises Melissa a life without toil, being admired by spectators, but seeing that the ‘ravishing delights’ of ‘ever-varying amusement’ are a mask for vice, she chooses to follow Housewifery, who is ‘garnished with scissors, knitting needles, reels, and other implements of female labour’.<sup>119</sup> The needle is universal and democratic given that sewing is accessible to all in some form, whether that is as a genteel pastime, a domestic necessity, or as a form of employment. Charlotte Smith takes advantage of the fluid status of needlework to facilitate Monimia’s

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<sup>116</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 147.

<sup>117</sup> Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women’s Press, 1984). This text argues that whilst the practice of needlework reinforced the eighteenth-century feminine ideal of the wife and mother, it could also provide a creative outlet.

<sup>118</sup> Freya Gowrley, ‘The Sister Arts: Textile Crafts between Paint, Print and Practice’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43.2 (June 2020), 139-59.

<sup>119</sup> John Aikin and Anna Barbauld ‘The Female Choice, A Tale’, *Evenings at Home; or, The Juvenile Budget Opened*, Vol. III (London: J. Johnson, 1793), pp. 156-61 (pp. 157-58).

social mobility. Being schooled in an accomplishment that can be useful and ornamental means that Monimia can adapt to the situation and easily apply her skill as a ladylike pursuit or as a means to earn a living.

Although Monimia possesses unaffected, natural talent, she does not escape being appraised by her appearance at the spinning wheel: ‘Her shape was symmetry itself, and her motions so graceful, that it was impossible to behold her even attached to her humble employment at the wheel, without acknowledging that no art could give what nature had bestowed upon her’.<sup>120</sup> Here, the narrator describes the aesthetic appeal of an artist at work ‘observed by visitors who happened to see her’, including Orlando as he ‘began to feel a more tender and more respectful attention for her’.<sup>121</sup> Orlando duly supplements her education with poetry as a means of shaping her into his ideal companion: ‘The books he had given her, the extracts she had made from them, and her remarks, afforded them conversation, and gave to Orlando exquisite delight. He had animated the lovely statue.’<sup>122</sup> Monimia is more than an aesthetically pleasing object, and in line with Wollstonecraft’s vision for female education, becomes a companion. However, in playing Pygmalion, Orlando attempts to mould Monimia into his romantic ideal reflecting his own tastes, and does not consider what will give her delight or that her work might make her happy.

Orlando does not expect Monimia to use her needlework skills to earn a living once she is his wife, but necessity drives her to seek employment. Monimia does not consider this to be a hardship, declaring: ‘I have always been used to work, Orlando,’ [...] ‘you know that I never was brought up to any other expectation – Where then will be the difficulty or the

<sup>120</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 14.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 161. In describing Orlando ‘animating the lovely statue’, Smith alludes to the Pygmalion myth, recounted in Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Pygmalion is the Cypriot sculptor who falls in love with the statue of a woman he carves from ivory. His wish for a bride who is the living likeness of his work is granted by the goddess Aphrodite when he kisses the statue and feels it warm to his touch. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville, ed. by E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 232-234.

hardship of my employing myself to assist in our mutual support?’<sup>123</sup> Work is not degrading for Monimia, but her industry is concealed from Orlando’s family. In describing her heroine’s work with textiles, Smith reclaims a traditionally female realm of employment through Monimia at a time when men were taking ‘effeminate’ jobs, leaving little opportunity for women to find work. Mary Ann Radcliffe was one writer to take up her pen and employ language associated with the Gothic tale of terror to speak of the persecution of women within the confines of a patriarchal society, and argue for improvements in female education and employment in order to save women from falling into prostitution. It is uncertain whether Mary Ann Radcliffe was also the author of Gothic novels published under her name, or whether unscrupulous publishers were trading on the similarity of her name to that of Ann Radcliffe. However, in *The Female Advocate; Or, an Attempt to Rescue the Rights of Woman from Male Usurpation* (1799) she uses the idea of ‘usurpation’ to question the employment of men in female roles: ‘What can be said in favour of men-milliners, men-mantua-makers, and men stay-makers? besides all the numerous train of other professions, such as hair-dressers &c. &c.; all of which occupations are much more calculated for women than men.’<sup>124</sup> Such roles were especially needed by women without the protection of male relatives or friends. Isobel Grundy notes that with her husband’s businesses losing money and her personal fortune dwindling, Mary Ann Radcliffe was herself forced to take on various employments, including sewing and housekeeping, in order to support her eight children.<sup>125</sup> Jennie Batchelor states that ‘of all Smith’s early novels’ *The Old Manor House* ‘is most preoccupied with the question of work.’<sup>126</sup> However, despite this preoccupation, Batchelor notes that Monimia’s work tends to be ‘occluded’ from the narrative as Orlando ‘repeatedly seeks to

<sup>123</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 479.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Ann Radcliffe, *The Female Advocate; Or, an Attempt to Rescue the Rights of Woman from Male Usurpation* (London: Printed for Vernor and Hood, 1799), p. 20.

<sup>125</sup> Isobel Grundy, ‘Radcliffe, Mary Ann’, ODNB, published 23 September 2004 [online]: <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/sheffield.idm.oclc.org/view/article/37876>>[accessed 13/11/17].

<sup>126</sup> Jennie Batchelor, *Women’s Work: Labour, gender, authorship, 1750-1830* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 72.

recast the working girl as a wronged romance heroine, whose character and demeanour he believes to be superior to her rank, and whose deliverance from labour he intends to secure'.<sup>127</sup> It is telling that the aesthetic appraisal of Monimia at the spinning wheel comes before the activity is tainted by financial necessity. Whilst there may be no place for women's work in the traditional romance plot, Smith does give her heroine the opportunity to provide when the ineffectual hero cannot. Eventually Rayland Hall is reformed under Orlando's benevolent stewardship, and the estate becomes the kind of productive utopia as previously envisioned in *Millenium Hall* and *Munster Village*, but without the same rigidity in social structure. Showing the value of personal merit over social standing, the lowly heroine is granted a happy marriage with the aristocratic hero.

*Marchmont* (1796) is another of Smith's later novels to engage with the question of female employment, with Alethea Dacres and the aristocratic Marchmont women reduced to making paper flowers. Following her mother's death and her father's subsequent remarriage, Alethea has been raised by her aunt. Despite being reunited with her father at 16, she refuses his demand for her to marry the lawyer, Mr Mohun, and is duly punished by being sent to live amongst the ruins of Eastwoodleigh House; the ancestral home of the Jacobite Marchmont family, who have had to give it up owing to insurmountable debts.<sup>128</sup> Without the financial support of her father, Alethea is drawn to join the Marchmont women in a venture to open a milliner's shop. Even though Alethea is in as much need as Mrs Marchmont and her daughters, Batchelor suggests that philanthropy *masks* 'the heroine's financial distress and seems to transform manual work into an exercise in disinterested benevolence'.<sup>129</sup> For

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<sup>127</sup> Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p. 72.

<sup>128</sup> The Marchmont family have suffered from a loss in social standing owing to their ancestors supporting the Jacobite cause. In presenting the financial struggles of a generation of women left without paternal support, Smith equates political disenfranchisement with the disenfranchised position of women in society. Charlotte Smith, *Marchmont, The works of Charlotte Smith*, Vol. 9. ed. by Kate Davies and Harriet Guest (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2016).

<sup>129</sup> Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p. 79.

Alethea, the pleasure of assisting her friends far outweighs the financial reward. Smith does acknowledge that in opening a shop the women would suffer an irretrievable loss in social standing. Whilst they have been able to discreetly bring work into their home, a shop would be a public declaration of financial need. Philanthropy, however, has the power to legitimize female labour.<sup>130</sup> In his 1797 *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, Erasmus Darwin recommends the arts as practical means of teaching children compassion. He suggests that making ‘works of taste’, such as artificial flowers, and then ‘bestowing these on poor people, in order that they might sell them for their support’, will produce ‘a habit of benevolence in children’.<sup>131</sup> He then goes on to tell of how a Miss Hartley, who ‘has been long distinguished by her talents as an artist in painting’, has ‘lately distributed her elegant performances among the poor famished emigrants, who reside in her neighbourhood; who are thus greatly assisted by the sale of her works’.<sup>132</sup> Darwin stops short of explicitly saying that women could sell such items to support themselves, but he does acknowledge that ‘there are situations in the married state; which may call forth all the energies of the mind in the care, education, or provision, for a family; which the inactivity, folly, or death of a husband may render necessary’.<sup>133</sup> Understanding the impact of a husband’s ‘inactivity’ or ‘folly’, Smith’s novel *Montalbert* (1795) reveals the risk in being educated above one’s station and attracting the attention of an unsuitable partner. However, differing from the rags to riches Cinderella stories of Monimia and Emmeline, Rosalie Lessington’s accomplishment leaves her dependent upon men and ill-equipped to support herself.

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<sup>130</sup> Susan Ferrier’s novel *Marriage* (1818) is more sceptical of supposedly philanthropic practice, showing Mrs Fox exploit the kindness of her visitors, who feel obliged to buy the work of her *poor protégées*. See Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 411. However, philanthropy is presented as the most desirable of accomplishments by Hannah More in her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), to be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>131</sup> Darwin, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 49.

<sup>132</sup> Darwin, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 50.

<sup>133</sup> Darwin, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 11.

### The Dangers of Accomplishment in *Montalbert*

Unlike Emmeline and Monimia, Rosalie Lessington has the opportunity to be tutored in typically female accomplishments whilst she is a guest of the Vyvian family at Holmwood House. Unbeknownst to Rosalie, she is in fact the natural daughter of Mrs Vyvian who, following an ill-fated love affair with a Mr Ormsby, prevailed upon her friend Mrs Lessington to care for their secret child so that she could go on to marry the suitor chosen by her parents. Although Rosalie does not become aware of her true origins until much later in the novel, her accomplishments demarcate her position on the periphery of both family circles. It is thought improper for Rosalie to be introduced into London society alongside the Vyvian girls, so she has to return home to the parsonage. Here, her fluency in French and Italian is useless with no fellow speakers to converse with. Furthermore, she does not have the same recourse to continue her studies with her father's library only containing sermons, whilst her mother is described as having studied only 'the utile, rather than the dulci' since her days at a country boarding school.<sup>134</sup> The focus on the useful as opposed to the sweet is evident in the few books she owns, which include *Mrs Glasse's Cookery* (1747) and *Every Lady her own Housekeeper* (1790).<sup>135</sup> As Ann Bermingham notes on boarding school education: 'Originally these institutions taught English, arithmetic, needle work, bookkeeping, and natural history for a flat fee of about 40 to 200 guineas a year, and for about 10 to 50 guineas more a girl could be taught extras such as French, drawing, music, dancing, and writing', noting that by the 1790s 'these "extras" had become part of the regular

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<sup>134</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Montalbert, The works of Charlotte Smith*, Vol. 8. ed. by Stuart Curran and Adriana Craciun (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2016), p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> Hannah Glasse (1708-1770): Her first cookery book, *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* (London, 1747), became the best-selling recipe book of the period, with twenty editions issued in the eighteenth century alone. It remained popular and continued to be reprinted well into the nineteenth century; *Every Lady her own Housekeeper* could refer to John Perkins, *Every Woman Her Own House-keeper; Or, The Ladies' Library*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (London: James Ridgeway, 1796).

curriculum supplanting more practical subjects like bookkeeping.’<sup>136</sup> P.J. Miller suggests that with such variation in cost, ‘it is reasonable to assume that ‘the education of a lady’ was being received in some form or another by girls from a wide variety of income and social groups.’<sup>137</sup> However, the position of accomplishments as a commodity to be purchased immediately aligns the most accomplished women as the highest in society.

Living with the aristocratic Vyvian family, Rosalie has been educated above her station and can have no pretensions to securing a rich husband during the London season. In the words of Hannah More, she has been educated ‘just enough to laugh at their fond parents’ rustic manners and vulgar language.’<sup>138</sup> Drawing is the one delicate amusement Rosalie can continue to pursue, but her favourite spot looking down on Holmwood is particularly symbolic of her position as an outsider:

To seat herself on the turf of the down above the house, on the root of a thorn, or one of those beech trees which were scattered about the foot of the hill, and make sketches of detached pieces of the extensive landscape stretched before her; or of the old and fantastic trees that formed her shady canopy, was now become her only enjoyment; and very sincerely did she regret, and very reluctantly did she obey the summons, she too frequently received to return to the house, either to make tea for some accidental visitors of her new brother-in-law’s acquaintance, or to superintend a syllabus in the summer-house.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ann Bermingham, ‘Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The commerce in culture and self-image in eighteenth-century England’, in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. by John Brewer and Ann Bermingham (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 489-513 (p. 497).

<sup>137</sup> P.J. Miller, ‘Women’s Education’, p. 306. Miller records yearly fees ranging between six and upward of 100 guineas.

<sup>138</sup> Hannah More, ‘The Two Wealthy Farmers; Or, The History of Mr Bragwell’ [1797], in *The Works of Hannah More*, Vol. 1 of 7 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), pp. 24-104 (p. 28). In this short story, More preaches a moral lesson against vanity by contrasting the conduct of two farmers. The Bragwells aspire for their daughters to lead a life of genteel idleness, and so send them to a boarding school to be educated for ornament rather than usefulness. This leaves them unfit to assist their parents and both girls go on to make unhappy marriages, marred by their husbands’ debts. At the end of the tale, the education of Farmer Bragwell’s grandson is entrusted to Mr Worthy, the old friend and neighbour who lives by the motto: ‘Can I afford it? Secondly, Is it proper for me?’ p. 33.

<sup>139</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 10.

With the Vyvian family away in London she can no longer join them inside, and Rosalie occupies a liminal space beyond the bounds of the Lessington family parsonage, encroaching onto the outskirts of the Vyvian family estate. As an illegitimate child she does not fully belong with either her adoptive family or with that of her birth mother. The focus on detached pieces of the landscape here is similar to the view which Hannah More invokes in the analogy she uses to describe the limitations of female thought: ‘A woman sees the world, as if it were, from a little elevation in her own garden, whence she makes an exact survey of home scenes, but takes not in that wider range of distant prospects which he who stands on a loftier eminence commands’<sup>140</sup> More seeks to demarcate the boundaries of the female sphere, but Smith, on the other hand, does not suggest that a limited world-view is something inherently female that should not be challenged. For her it is the product of the restricted, defective kind of education based on accomplishments Mary Wollstonecraft attacks in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make woman the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire. This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others, and content with its own station; for the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions.<sup>141</sup>

Drawing is not overtly criticized here, but as something which excites emotion rather than reason, and takes Rosalie away from useful duties, it fits with Wollstonecraft’s critique of accomplishment. In a mid-nineteenth-century conduct book, Mrs Ellis recommends drawing on the basis that it is, ‘of all other occupations, the one most calculated to keep the mind from brooding upon self, and to maintain that general cheerfulness which is part of social and

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<sup>140</sup> More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 383.

<sup>141</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p131.

domestic duty.’<sup>142</sup> However, in this case drawing feeds Rosalie’s melancholy as she dwells on disjointed scenes from the past rather than admiring the sublime or picturesque attributes of the wider landscape. Ellis also suggests that drawing can easily be put aside and returned to later, but this is resented by Rosalie, who is all too frequently forced to lay down her drawing to fulfil her domestic duties. In Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), the potential for the pleasure of artistic endeavour to supersede the call of duty is explored in relation to Clara’s obsessive lute-playing. Clara’s drawings adorn the walls of the château to be enjoyed by all, whereas her music becomes a selfish indulgence. She is lulled by the enchantments of the lute to the extent that she loses all sense of time. As a consequence, a sick family she should have visited are left without food: ‘Madame was displeased that her niece had neglected her domestic duties, and wished to reprove her, but La Luc begged she would be silent. ‘Let experience teach her her error,’ said he; ‘precept seldom brings conviction to young minds.’’<sup>143</sup> The didactic message is that Clara learns through experience, as Rousseau suggests in *Emile*, but Radcliffe has a less restricted view on female education with Clara learning to reason. Rather than giving up music entirely following its negative influence upon her, she comes to understand that it is possible to balance duty and pleasure. However, in *Montalbert* Rosalie is led astray by the allurements held for the opposite sex before she can learn to reason.

The danger for artistic endeavour to bring members of the opposite sex together is particularly highlighted by Smith as Mrs. Vyvian’s nephew, Montalbert, displays particular skill in using the guise of a tutor to get close to Rosalie:

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<sup>142</sup> Mrs Ellis, *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character, and Responsibilities*, in *The Prose Works of Mrs. Ellis*, Vol. 1 of 2 (New York: Henry G. Langley, 1844), p. 38.

<sup>143</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. by Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1999), p. 249.

As Mrs. Vyvian was pleased to encourage her taste in drawing, Montalbert, who without any affection understood it extremely well, was giving her some rules, and, leaning over her chair, was lost in the pleasure of instructing his charming pupil; but he sometimes varied a little from what he undertook to teach, and, instead of giving her a sketch of the object he was describing, he wrote a line or two in Italian.<sup>144</sup>

In using the acquisition of female accomplishments as cover for sexual advances, Montalbert and Rosalie are repeating the follies of the previous generation. Mr Ormsby conducted his illicit affair with Mrs Vyvian (née Miss Montalbert) in Italian so that they would not be interpreted. Miss Vyvian knowingly comments on the reason for Montalbert's absence when she remarks: 'Oh! I see now, Mr. Montalbert, from whence it happens, that your friends in town complain that they never see you – you have found employment here in teaching the fine arts.'<sup>145</sup> In his reply to the insinuation of preferment, Montalbert simultaneously flatters Rosalie's artistic skill whilst defending himself against the charge of spending all his time with her: 'if I were capable, Miss Vyvian, of instructing, I should think myself highly honoured were that young lady to become my scholar; but, I assure you, she is already so great a proficient, that it would not be in my power to improve the elegance of her execution.'<sup>146</sup> When it is remembered that Rosalie has been described as being 'no great proficient' it is clear that he is exaggerating.<sup>147</sup> Miss Vyvian's retort, 'and now I recollect, Miss Lessington, I think you used to be fond of drawing, and had some lessons *when you lived with us*',<sup>148</sup> emphasizes the fact that professional tutelage was only within Rosalie's grasp when bestowed at the kindness of her social superiors. With Rosalie blinded by an attraction based upon shared artistic interests, Montalbert manages to convince her to marry him without parental consent, even though differences in religion and class status, as well as

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<sup>144</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 67.

<sup>145</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 67.

<sup>146</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 68.

<sup>147</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 67.

Roslie's uncertain parentage, could prove insurmountable barriers to her being accepted by Montalbert's noble Italian family.<sup>149</sup>

Montalbert's sexualized, predatory male gaze differs from the connoisseurship displayed by Walsingham in the latter stages of the novel set in Italy. Rosalie is being held captive at the ruined fort of Formiscusa under the orders of her mother-in-law, who does not approve of the union between her Catholic son and a poor, Protestant Englishwoman, when Walsingham spots her. He has been purchasing antiquities in the area and his comparative gaze of a connoisseur identifies Rosalie as 'very unlike the inhabitants of the surrounding country'.<sup>150</sup> Walsingham views Rosalie as a work of art, and defends his interest in her in terms of his interest in antiquities to his friend, De Montagny:

I am not enchanted with the beauty of Mrs. Montalbert, superior as I acknowledge it to be to that of most women I have seen; therefore I shall have no merit in acting by her, as I ought, indeed, to act, even if I *were* enamoured of her. But you know, Chevalier, that to me the most lovely women are become mere objects of admiration, like the pictures and statues of Italy.<sup>151</sup>

Walsingham states that his gaze is disinterested, following Jonathan Richardson's definition proffered in *The Science of a Connoisseur* (1719). However, De Montagny doubts his resolution:

I only fear, that being continually with such a woman as Madame de Montalbert, hearing from those beautiful lips, professions of gratitude, and gazing on those charming eyes, filled with tears of tenderness, it may prove, at last, a very severe trial to my friend's fortitude, when the hour shall come in which he must give her back to this happy Montalbert.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> The power of shared artistic tastes to lead a heroine into a bad match can also be seen in Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

<sup>150</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 192.

<sup>151</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 204.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 204.

De Montagny's blazon, praising Rosalie's eyes and lips, effectively brings her to life. However, Rosalie is not a statue, but a human being with human emotions. Whether speaking words of gratitude or crying tears of tenderness, De Montagny attempts to animate her as a means of illustrating to Walsingham the ease with which he could fall in love with her.

Walsingham believes that his scientific level of connoisseurship protects him from such accusations, but the figure of the gentleman connoisseur is often an object of ridicule rather than respect. Sir William Hamilton is one connoisseur whose writings were used by Smith in her descriptions of the Messina earthquake, but his claims to disinterested connoisseurship were challenged by his sexualized male gaze, viewing his mistress in relation to the ancient statuary he collected.

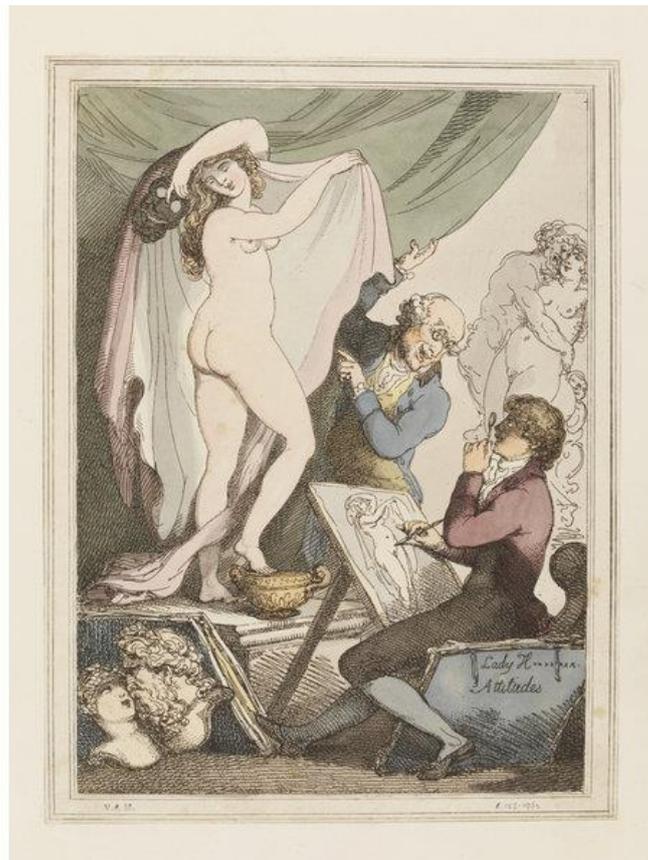


Figure 2.9: Thomas Rowlandson, Lady H\_\_\_\_\_ Attitudes (published mid 1810s), V&A, London, Museum No. E.122-1952, image © V&A.

When Hamilton married Emma Hart, Horace Walpole wryly remarked that ‘Sir William has actually married his gallery of statues’.<sup>153</sup> Caricatures, including the example by Rowlandson pictured overleaf, show how Emma Hamilton’s performance of ‘Attitudes’ taken from classical sources complicates the distinction between art and life, to the extent that she can be seen as embodying her art.

In *The Citizen of the World* (1760-1) Oliver Goldsmith uses the outsider’s perspective of a fictional Chinese traveller to ironically voice his concern that: ‘Some young men of distinction are found to travel through Europe with no other intention than that of understanding and collecting pictures, studying seals, and describing statues.’ In doing so they: ‘waste the prime of life in wonder; skilled in pictures, ignorant in men; yet impossible to be reclaimed, because their follies take shelter under the names of delicacy and taste.’<sup>154</sup> Connoisseurship was supposed to expand a man’s knowledge of the world through observation, comparison, and categorization. As noted by Brewer: ‘The purpose of contemplating an image was not to learn about its creator or to identify the marks of his creativity – issues of manner and style that were later to become so important – but to acquire knowledge about the world.’<sup>155</sup> However, with such a myopic focus on minutiae, the focus can be too narrow, and reveal more about how the collector perceives themselves and their own place in the world.

Although Walsingham does deliver Rosalie back to Montalbert, his proclaimed disinterested gaze does falter as he realizes that an ‘almost imperceptible attachment’ to

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<sup>153</sup> Horace Walpole, letter to The Miss Berrys, 11 September, 1791, in *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, ed. by Peter Cunningham, Vol. 9 (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), p. 345.

<sup>154</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World* in *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, Vol. 3 (Glasgow: R. Chapman, 1816), p. 115.

<sup>155</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 255. This view of connoisseurship can be referred back to Delamere, as he is not concerned with appraising Emmeline’s skill as an artist, but in acquiring knowledge of what the work can reveal. However, in this case it is false connoisseurship as there is no comparison made to the work of others, and the focus is purely on the use of art as an accomplishment or social cue to convey sexual interest.

Rosalie 'had crept into his bosom'.<sup>156</sup> Had Montalbert died, he and Rosalie could have found love in consoling one another but, with her husband alive, Walsingham is reminded that his lost love Leonora was the only one for him, and is, therefore, destined to continue travelling as a lone wanderer in pursuit of knowledge. Walsingham proves his disinterested nature by working to ensure Rosalie's happiness, not his own. Returning Rosalie home to England to be reunited with her husband, Walsingham survives Montalbert's jealous rage before travelling back to Italy to bring about a reconciliation between Montalbert and his disapproving mother.

Claims to connoisseurship may protect Walsingham, but female accomplishment fails Rosalie. Fitting with the idea that female artistry is intended merely to attract a husband and fill the idle hours of youth, Rosalie's pursuit of accomplishment ends once she elopes to Italy and becomes a dutiful yet wronged wife and mother. Her artistry has not secured her an ideal husband, as the passion that made Montalbert such an attractive suitor makes him a rash husband who is quick to judge, as he wrongly assumes that his wife has committed adultery during his absence. Even her accomplishment in Italian fails her in that Rosalie remains an outsider despite her grasp of the language. Rosalie is not a husband-hunter in the mould of Miss Hollybourn, but neither is she equipped with a useful skill like Monimia, and she lacks the resolve of Emmeline. Nevertheless, Smith is sympathetic to her plight in a novel coloured by a mournful sense of regret. As noted by Ellen Moody, Smith is forgiving of sexual transgression and places the blame upon tyrannical parents.<sup>157</sup> When Hannah More wrote her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), she responded to novels like *Montalbert* with a

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<sup>156</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p. 290.

<sup>157</sup> Ellen Moody, "'People that marry can never part': An Intertextual Reading of Northanger Abbey", *Persuasions*, 31.1 (Winter 2010), [online]: <<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol31no1/moody.html>> [accessed 14/06/20].

harsher assessment of accomplishment, and preached in favour of parental wisdom on matters of matrimony.<sup>158</sup>

Published in December 1808,<sup>159</sup> Hannah More's first and only novel proved to be a bestseller, running into twelve editions in its first year alone. More had been particularly wary of the genre so often blamed for encouraging female frivolity, and so aimed to produce a religious novel to promote the values of her earlier works, such as her *Strictures on Education*, and delineate good and bad examples of female conduct. In search of a suitable wife, Charles is duly charmed by 'the quiet, cheerful, and unassuming elegance of Lucilla',<sup>160</sup> the approved choice of his parents who nurtures a charity garden to feed those in need. Charles has been taught to be wary of accomplished females, and consequently is not impressed by the three misses Ranby, who are fashionably dressed and all too keen to display their artistic attainments. The problem is that the verbal caricatures he provides makes them more memorable and entertaining than Lucilla. *The Christian Observer* argued that More need not have been so strict in her portrayal of the arts as unnecessary, frivolous accomplishments, stating that: 'it really seems hard on Lucilla, who has a fine ear and correct eye, not to allow her to cultivate graces for which she is naturally qualified.'<sup>161</sup> Having natural genius or taste makes cultivation of the arts acceptable, as stated in her *Strictures*, but in *Coelebs* More wants to make the contrast between virtue and vice all the more striking. Showing the danger of accomplishments in terms of their propensity to mask vice, she has Miss Denham elope with her music master, whilst Mrs Fentham, who has risen through the ranks by living beyond her means, falls from favour when her husband dies and leaves her

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<sup>158</sup> Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) can also be read as a response to Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1807). See Chapter Five of this thesis.

<sup>159</sup> Dated 1809

<sup>160</sup> Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, ed. by Patricia Demers (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions: 2007), p. 184.

<sup>161</sup> Anon, 'Review of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*', *The Christian Observer: Conducted by Members of the Established Church for the year 1809* (London: John Hatchard, 1810), pp. 109-21 (p. 121).

and her daughters in debt. Their society friends instantly drop them and refuse to help, insisting that ‘people ought to confine themselves to their own station, and live within their income’.<sup>162</sup> Without any useful skills to support themselves it is remarked that: ‘Their accomplishments might be turned to some account, if they were accompanied with real knowledge, useful acquirements, or sober habits’.<sup>163</sup> Although Charlotte Smith is more sympathetic in the treatment of Rosalie, her heroine’s happy ending is questionable given that she is bound to a man such as Montalbert for life. However, with all misunderstandings and mysteries neatly resolved by the end of the novel, there is hope for the next generation if they can learn from the mistakes of their forbears.

## Conclusions

Whilst Smith is a writer who shows how accomplishments can arm a woman with the skills required to support herself in times of financial necessity, as with Monimia’s needlework in *The Old Manor House* and the plan to open a milliner’s shop in *Marchmont*, she acknowledges the difficulties women face in selling their wares. Making money from the arts is actually fraught with difficulties, especially when performance and display are considered immodest. Judith Wilson highlights the inherent paradox to Smith’s own personal situation: ‘having an education set her apart from the class of women who worked; having an inescapable financial need to work set her apart from women of her own class.’<sup>164</sup> Smith made no secret of needing to write for money, but she was careful to use her work as a means of preserving her social standing. Even though *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) was written whilst she was with her husband in debtors’ prison, she boldly appends ‘of Bignor Park’ to her name on the title page, laying claim to the family estate inherited by her brother. Poetry has the power

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<sup>162</sup> More, *Coelebs*, p. 360.

<sup>163</sup> More, *Coelebs*, p. 361.

<sup>164</sup> Judith Wilson, ‘Introduction’ to *Charlotte Smith: Selected Poems* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. viii.

to confer upon her the status which her marriage had compromised. As Jacqueline M. Labbe attests: ‘the *Sonnets* generated both cash and reputation for Smith, and confirmed for her that poetry could regain her the status her marriage had cost her.’<sup>165</sup> Labbe heralds Smith’s decision to publish under her own name as ‘an open and declaratory gesture towards individuality.’<sup>166</sup> More than just a claim to an intellectual and genteel identity, Smith reconciles these characteristics as aspects of women’s work.

In *Emmeline*, *The Old Manor House*, and *Montalbert* Smith is careful to draw a distinction between accomplishments cultivated as useful skills and those pursued merely to attract a husband, but what remains is the artist’s inability to control the male gaze. To return to the prints of music and drawing in Maria Cosway’s *The Progress of Female Virtue and The Progress of Female Dissipation*, described at the opening of this chapter, the accomplished female is subject to aesthetic appraisal whether she courts attention or not. As the accompanying caption for *Virtue* reads: ‘While Nature’s beauties her free lines pourtray,| She knows not that she’s fairer far than they.’ Anne K. Mellor describes the image as ‘revolutionary’, in that there is no ‘interposition of a male mentor or male-authored art.’<sup>167</sup> However, these short lines reveal that the landscape artist’s work will still be judged in comparison to her appearance. To escape the association with artful accomplishment, a professional woman artist could dedicate herself to the pursuit of one talent, as seen in Angelica Kauffman’s *Self-portrait of the Artist Hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. Like Cosway, Kauffman too presents art

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<sup>165</sup> Jacqueline M. Labbe, ‘Introduction’ to *The Old Manor House* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2002), p. 12. Also, for a more detailed consideration of women’s relationship to property see Labbe, ‘Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 34.2: The Romantic-Era Novel (Spring 2001), 216-31.

<sup>166</sup> Labbe, ‘Introduction’ to *The Old Manor House*, p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> Anne K. Mellor, ‘British Romanticism, Gender, and Three Women Artists’, in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. by John Brewer and Ann Bermingham (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 121-42 (p. 135).

as the virtuous pathway.<sup>168</sup> For Mellor, what is particularly significant about Cosway's picture of *Virtue* is the fact that the woman artist depicted 'does not *copy* the works of men but rather draws directly from Nature.' By embedding an image of a mother kneeling besides a baby's bassinet alongside her depiction of a woman artist drawing from nature, Mellor argues that Cosway 'defines the female artistic process as a legitimate participation in a natural rhythm of generational production.'<sup>169</sup> Equating the production of art with the production of children legitimizes the role of the woman artist. However, as a form of reproduction so often denigrated, copying warrants further consideration within the literary and cultural context of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The next chapter will consider Ann Radcliffe's characterization of a professional artist and skilled copyist, as influenced by the career of Kauffman, and chart Radcliffe's own influence upon Mary Shelley in order to reappraise the process of artistic imitation.

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<sup>168</sup> Paired sisters, such as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, further illustrate the different personality traits of musicians and artists.

<sup>169</sup> Mellor, 'British Romanticism, gender, and three women artists', p. 135.

## Chapter Three

### Copy Artists: Imitation as a Creative Act in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Last Man* (1826)

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself.

Mary Shelley, Preface to *Frankenstein* (1831)<sup>1</sup>

In her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley describes her creative process in terms of imitation; the idea that ‘the materials must, in the first place, be afforded’ suggests that invention emerges by reusing what has been done before, but in a new way. Recalling her childhood habit of imitation, Shelley states: ‘Everything must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase, and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.’<sup>2</sup> The Gothic tradition provides that link as Shelley not only read and enjoyed Ann Radcliffe’s work, but specifically refers to *The Italian* (1797) in *The Last Man* (1826) when, wandering around the ruins of Rome, Lionel Verney remembers how his ‘boyish blood had thrilled’ whilst reading the novel.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will address Radcliffe’s influence upon Shelley in terms of their use of artist heroines whose work is deemed imitative.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Shelley, ‘1831 Preface to *Frankenstein*’, in *Frankenstein: 1818 text*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8. Unless otherwise stated, this edition of the 1818 text will be referenced throughout this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley, ‘1831 Preface to *Frankenstein*’, p. 8. In framing her thoughts as a ‘Sanchean phrase’, Shelley refers to the wise and witty proverbs spoken by Sancho Panza in Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605). This act in itself positions her work in relation to her literary predecessors.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley read *The Italian* in 1814, with her diary entry for Sunday 27 November recording: ‘Read the Italian and talk all day – a very happy day indeed.’ See Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Vol. 1: 1814-1822 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 48. For Shelley’s reference to *The Italian* in *The Last Man* see Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. by Morton D. Paley (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008), p. 462. This section of the novel will be analysed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Given that Gothic fiction, and women's art more generally, are associated with imitative artistic practice, the claim made by Shelley in her preface works to reappraise what constitutes creative output. Gothic 'recipes' published during the 1790s, such as 'Terrorist Novel Writing' (1797), emphasize the formulaic nature of many of the Gothic novels published at this time, with the same plot twists and motifs re-used time and time again:

Take – An old castle, half of it ruinous.  
 A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.  
 Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.  
 As many skeletons, in chests and presses.  
 An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut;  
 Assassins and desperados quant. suff.  
 Noises, whispers and groans, three-score at least.  
 Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed.  
 PROBATUM EST.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst recipes of this kind mock the over-reliance on a limited set of stock tropes, Shelley knowingly plays with the literary and artistic productions of her predecessors, particularly Ann Radcliffe, in order to comment upon creativity. With the inclusion of a female character skilled in painting copies providing a further link between their novels, a focus on the work produced by the artist heroines of Radcliffe and Shelley will serve to illustrate the scope for creativity within the artist's copy and show how the creative processes of these two writers are mirrored in the art of their heroines. In *The Sign of Angellica* (1989), Janet Todd has outlined how women artists and writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used self-presentation as a means of balancing the demands of their profession with the expectations of their sex.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I will show how Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley specifically use the figure of the copyist to describe their creative processes and negotiate their place in the literary marketplace.

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<sup>4</sup> Anon, 'Terrorist Novel Writing', *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: James Ridgway, 1802), pp. 227-29 (p. 229).

<sup>5</sup> Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989), p. 9.

Elaine Showalter has argued that imitation is intrinsic to women's writing, forming an important stage of development necessary for a woman to go on to find her own voice. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Showalter responds to John Stuart Mill's beliefs on imitation, published in *The Subjection of Women* (1869): 'If women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own.'<sup>6</sup> Despite arguing against the legal subordination of one sex to another, Mill's assertion that women were destined to be imitators of a male precedent, not innovators, is challenged with the counterargument that women's writing has gone through three stages of development, which Showalter identifies as *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and finally, *Female*:

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, in search for identity.<sup>7</sup>

Although Showalter's work is focused upon women's writing from the rise of the male pseudonym in the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, it provides a point of comparison from which to analyse the idea of artistic imitation in the eighteenth century. Showalter suggests that the volume of anonymously penned works, along with the propensity for men to masquerade as women writers under a female pseudonym, complicates the study of eighteenth-century women's writing, but in this chapter I intend to focus upon the idea of imitation, taking Showalter's definition and extending it to the characterization of artist heroines as copyists or imitators to show how there is space for creativity within the copy. Lisa Heer has described how copying can be seen as 'transforming the woman artist

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), p. 132. Quoted in Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*, p. 13.

into an ideal spectator or audience for the appreciation of male genius'.<sup>8</sup> However, imitation does not necessarily imply a passive acceptance or internalization of the patriarchal *status quo*. Rather, imitation can provide a framework within which talent can be honed and the genesis for new ideas explored.

Following an outline of the contested status of copies in the period, this chapter will explore three literary examples of women producing copies in relation to the cultural climate in which they were produced. Beginning with Ellena Rosalba's fashionable and prestigious copies from the antique in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), it will be argued that Radcliffe raises the status of women's art through reference to the excavation of Herculaneum. I will then return to Mary Shelley's ideas on artistic creativity and the copy to show how literary and artistic imitation can create something new. Paying particular attention to her copyist heroines, Elizabeth Lavenza in *Frankenstein* (1818) and Perdita Verney in *The Last Man* (1826), will show the moral value of their work.

### **The Contested Status of Copies**

The copy has always been an integral first step in the artistic training of both men and women, and as part of the studio tradition the copy could also play a vital role in the circulation of an image by responding to consumer demand. However, lacking the exalted status of an original, copies are often seen as lacking creative thought, as argued by Joshua Reynolds. As the President of the Royal Academy of Arts from its foundation in 1768 until his death in 1792, Joshua Reynolds was in a position to influence the direction of British art and raise the status of his own work. The inferior status of copies is something emphasized by Reynolds in his *Seven Discourses on Art* (1769-1790), delivered as yearly lectures to

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Heer, 'Copyists', *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. by Delia Gaze (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 34-42 (p. 40).

students of the Royal Academy of Art during his presidency. In his *Second Discourse*, delivered in 1769, he does concede that copying from the Old Masters is an acceptable starting point for students wishing to learn the ‘mechanics of painting’. However, he argued that the ability to merely copy what has been done before does not make a great artist:

I consider general copying as a delusive kind of industry; the student satisfies himself with the appearance of doing something, and of labouring without any determinate object; as it requires no effort of the mind, he sleeps over his work: and these powers of invention and composition which ought particularly to be called out, and put in action, lie torpid, and lose their energy for want of exercise.<sup>9</sup>

In short, copying lacks original genius. A student would need to gain experience of designing their own compositions in order to develop their talent.

Imitation, when linked to the concept of *inventio* in the rhetorical tradition, is much more than artless copying. In the classical model of education, the student would learn from ideal examples in order for these to provide a foundation or framework to which their own ideas could then be successfully applied. According to Plato all art is imitative in its aim to represent nature. Plato’s mimetic view of the arts is illustrated in the story he recounts of the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. As outlined in the previous chapter, the hyper-realistic image of grapes painted by Zeuxis may fool the birds who attempt to feed on them, but Parrhasius fools Zeuxis himself when he tries to draw aside the curtain he has painted.<sup>10</sup> The Platonic conception of art as a direct representation of nature has drawn criticism for being too close to science, as expressed by W.J. Verdenius:

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<sup>9</sup> Joshua Reynolds, ‘Discourse II’ (December 1769), *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by John Burnet (London: Carpenter, 1842), pp. 17-35 (p. 23).

<sup>10</sup> See *Pliny’s Natural History*, Book 35, Chapter 36, pp. 259-412. These two Greek painters, working in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, were renowned for realism, but no known works survive.

He is said to have forgotten that true art does not copy an existing reality, but that it creates a new reality arising from the artist's own phantasy, and that it is the spontaneous character of this expression which guarantees the independent value of purely aesthetic qualities.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of scope for imaginative self-expression leads Verdenius to suggest that this is why 'under the influence of Romanticism, it [imitation] became discredited.'<sup>12</sup> Despite noting in *Emile* that children are 'great imitators' with a natural inclination for drawing, Rousseau states that he does not want his ideal pupil to learn from copies:

I insist upon his having no other master than nature, and no other model than the real objects. I am resolved he shall have his eye on the very original, and not on the paper that represents it; he shall sketch a house from a real house, a tree from a real tree, a human figure from a real man, to the end that he may use himself to make a careful survey of bodies, and of their different appearances, and not to mistake false copies for real imitations.<sup>13</sup>

For Rousseau, learning to draw is more about obtaining knowledge of the world than honing artistic talent. The physiological advantage of strengthening the hand developed alongside the mental benefits of understanding perspective, form, and how to distinguish between types. A return to nature constitutes a return to the natural state of man, uncorrupted by society. Here, an imitation is taken directly from nature, whereas a copy is produced by replicating the work of another artist.

However, the difference between a copy and an imitation is not always clearly delineated. With the propensity for the terms to be used interchangeably posing a point of contention, Samuel Taylor Coleridge attempted to separate them; imitation for Coleridge 'means always a combination of a certain degree of dissimilitude with a certain degree of

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<sup>11</sup> W.J. Verdenius, *Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and its Meaning to Us* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Verdenius, *Mimesis*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, *Emilius*, pp. 192-93.

similitude.<sup>14</sup> Pleasure arises from the knowledge that it is a representation being viewed, not reality. Plato's anecdote describing how the painting by Zeuxis was so true to life that it fooled the birds is not, therefore, a hallmark of a great artist in Romantic terms. Had another artist come along and replicated this work, it would be yet another step away from the truth of nature. The artist's mind is what is needed to distinguish an imitation from a copy; a copy only needing close observation, whereas an imitation requires meditation upon the subject.

The copy was not universally denigrated in the Romantic period, with William Blake responding to Reynolds's description of the 'drudgery of copying'<sup>15</sup> by annotating his own copy of *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1798).<sup>16</sup> Blake saw value in the process of replication. As an experienced engraver, he knew that copying could function as a means of disciplining an artist's hand, and argued his case in his annotations: 'To learn the Language of Art Copy for Ever. Is my Rule'.<sup>17</sup> To carry on Blake's allusion to language, producing a copy is akin to the process of making a translation, with adaptations necessarily made to fit the new context.

Publications, including Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755), and Pierre d'Hancarville's *Antiquities Etrusques, Greques, et Romaines tirees du Cabinet de M. Hamilton* (1766) positively encouraged the reference to antique precedents. Placing copying and imitation on equal terms, D'Hancarville's book of engravings provided the source materials so that any artist 'who would INVENT in the same stile [sic], or only COPY the monuments which appeared

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lecture 3, 25 November 1811, quoted in Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), p. 98. Burwick compares Coleridge's views to the theories of Schelling.

<sup>15</sup> Reynolds, 'Discourse II', p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> The British Library hold this document: Joshua Reynolds, *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* [M.S notes by William Blake] (London: T. Cadell, 1798), shelf mark C.45.e 18-2-0.

<sup>17</sup> William Blake, 'Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds' ed. by Edmond Malone, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, new revised edition (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 635-61 (p. 636).

to him worthy of being copied may do so with as much truth and precision as if he had the Originals themselves in his possession.’<sup>18</sup> A later article on ‘Envy and Emulation’ to appear in *The Lady’s Magazine* (May 1820) goes as far as to position emulation as a moral act in that it stems from a desire to replicate excellence: ‘our minds, by this continual stretching towards higher things, insensibly become capable of greater and more noble flights than before; a generous emulation improves all our virtues, and subdues or totally eradicates many of our vices’. In contrast, envy creates bitterness that ‘nourishes all the vices of the soul’.<sup>19</sup> Reynolds himself does not completely rule out an imitative creative process, with the recommendation that: ‘Instead of copying the touches of those great masters, copy only their conceptions. Instead of treading in their footsteps, endeavour only to keep the same road. Labour to invent on their general principles and way of thinking.’<sup>20</sup> However, Blake disapproved of such generalization.<sup>21</sup> Whilst Reynolds does not explicitly state that copying is a suitably simple pastime for women, its exclusion from the masculine, professionalized world of fine art leaves it as an area of the arts open to them. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the value of imitation means that women writers’ allusion to copies is in need of reappraisal.

### **The Status of the Copy in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian***

The critical response generated by *The Italian* (1797) upon publication would suggest that Ann Radcliffe was simply reusing her by now well-rehearsed formula of stock characters and lengthy passages of landscape description in her fifth and final novel to be published within her lifetime. In *The Monthly Mirror*, Radcliffe is described as: ‘the author of several very

<sup>18</sup> Pierre d’Hancarville, *Antiquities Etrusques, Greques, et Romaines tirees du Cabinet de M. Hamilton*, Vol. I of IV (Naples: François Morelli, 1766), p. vi.

<sup>19</sup> Anon, ‘Envy and Emulation: A Moral Essay’, *The Lady’s Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (London: May 1820), pp. 225-27 (p. 225).

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, ‘Discourse II’, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Blake, ‘Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds’, p. 645.

popular productions of a similar nature',<sup>22</sup> and the reviewer for the *European Magazine and London Review* remarked that *The Italian*: 'exhibits many of the same beauties, as well as the defects, of her former compositions.'<sup>23</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge agreed, noting: 'the Italian falls short of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, by reminding us of the same characters and the same scenes.'<sup>24</sup> However, *The Italian* marks a significant point of departure for Radcliffe in two key respects: the later mid-eighteenth-century setting, and the treatment of the woman artist. Rather than temporally displace the novel to the medieval past, Radcliffe's prologue frames the narrative with an Englishman receiving the manuscript, outlining the events of 1758, sometime 'about the year 1764'.<sup>25</sup> With the year 1764 not only marking the year of Radcliffe's birth, but the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the date situates her work in the Gothic tradition. Furthermore, the excavations being undertaken at Pompeii and Herculaneum during this period enable Radcliffe to explore the opportunities for women's art in terms of copying from the antiquities unearthed.

Whilst the typical Radcliffian heroine frequently displays her accomplishment in the arts through the composition of poetry, music, and landscape drawings, only Ellena Rosalba is presented as a professional artist.<sup>26</sup> Having been taught by her aunt, Ellena's anonymously plied skill in the traditionally feminine arts of embroidery and the copying of designs from the antique allows her to succeed as a professional artist without transgressing gender norms.

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<sup>22</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Mirror*, 3 (March 1797), p. 155, reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, ed. by Deborah D. Rogers (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Anon, *European Magazine and London Review*, 31 (January 1797), p. 35, reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> [Samuel Taylor Coleridge], *Critical Review*, 23 (June 1798), p. 169, reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, ed. Robert Miles (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ann Radcliffe's first full-length novel, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) provides evidence of the importance of the arts in Radcliffe's works as she writes of the power of the arts in terms of their potential to promote female subjectivity. As precursors to Jane Austen's Elinor and Marianne, the contrasting personalities of sisters Emilia and Julia is highlighted through their artistic practice: where Emilia has the steady hand and observant eye required to quietly and diligently produce an accurate drawing, Julia possesses the heightened emotions a woman of sensibility can filter into musical expression. The choice to make Ellena a professional copyist in *The Italian* is, therefore, significant to her character development. See Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, ed. by Alison Milbank (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993).

Despite applied arts of this kind forming a category distinct from that of the fine arts, Radcliffe blurs the boundaries and ascribes high value to such female creativity in a way that self-reflexively justifies her own work as a woman writer. Ellena's professional status extends the opportunities open to women, and it is her engagement within Neapolitan commercial culture that enables her to support herself and her ageing aunt, Signora Bianchi. Financially, therefore, Ellena is someone who actively creates art to earn money, as opposed to being a disenfranchised heroine pursuing her rightful inheritance. However, in *Equivocal Beings* (1995) Claudia L. Johnson describes Ellena as 'a model of passive fortitude'.<sup>27</sup> For Johnson, 'Ellena bears significance only for how other characters respond to her rather than for how or what she does herself'.<sup>28</sup> Arguing against the view that Ellena is a passive Gothic heroine, this chapter will show how art provides her with financial independence as well as agency. The choice to set the novel in Naples during the time of the excavations of Herculaneum enables Radcliffe to engage with the way in which the commercial climate was driven by the mounting aesthetic interest in the region. Paying particular attention to the copies Ellena produces in relation to Johann Joachim Winckelmann's aesthetic theory of imitation and the neoclassical art of Angelica Kauffman, will show how Radcliffe raises the status of copies from the realms of insignificance described by Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses on Art*.

### **Opportunities for Women Artists**

In answer to the provocative question posed by the title of her 1971 essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', Linda Nochlin argues that it was: '*institutionally* made impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men,

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<sup>27</sup> Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 134.

*no matter* what the potency of their so-called talent, or genius.’<sup>29</sup> When the Royal Academy of Art was founded in 1768 it was with the aim of promoting contemporary British art at a time when the market was dominated by continental works acquired on the Grand Tour. By providing both training for artists and public exhibitions of their works, the Academy sought to raise the professional standing of the artist by setting a standard of excellence, and promoting this work as good taste to fashionable buyers. However, of the thirty-four founder members of the Royal Academy, only two were women: Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman. In Johan Zoffany’s conversation piece *The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771-2), their presence amongst their fellow members is reduced to a mere *mise en abîme*.



Figure 3.1: Johan Zoffany, *The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771-72), Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 400747, image © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), pp. 145-78 (p. 176).

Their portraits are displayed in the room depicted, but modesty would have forbidden their admittance when the painting shows a life drawing class in session. The fact that women were not permitted to attend life drawing classes put their development as artists at a distinct disadvantage to that of their male counterparts, and restricted them from progressing beyond copying. The Academy, therefore, actively promoted a hierarchy of arts that by its nature excluded many women. Women were not enrolled as students at the Royal Academy Schools until 1860, and then life models were modestly draped. However, Angelica Kauffman did still manage to forge a successful career tackling the prestigious subjects of history painting which were largely the preserve of men. Whilst Mary Moser's skilful flower painting was deemed both a suitable subject for a woman and the Academy, other typically female art forms including shellwork and paper cuts were banned from being exhibited at the Royal Academy.<sup>30</sup> As Vickery says: 'for all the professionalising snobberies of the Royal Academy, there must have been many consumers who preferred decorative flowers and watercolour landscapes to history painting.'<sup>31</sup> However, as the arbiters of taste, the Academy relegates such pursuits from the domain of fine art to the realm of amateur handicrafts in a way which could be interpreted as patriarchal gatekeeping.

The institutional exclusion of women from formal instruction either in workshops, academies, or life drawing classes no doubt contributes to the absence of women's work being listed amongst the greats of Art History, but a lack of biographical information and unsigned, anonymously produced, or misattributed works are also contributing factors. Women *were* active producers of art during the eighteenth century, but the genres they worked in have been reduced to the status of handicrafts pursued to ornament the home,

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<sup>30</sup> Notice placed in the *Public Advertiser*, 14 March 1781: 'Note, No Copies whatever, Drawings from Pictures, Needlework, Artificial Flowers, cut Paper, Shell Work, Models in coloured Wax, or any Imitations of Painting will be received.'

<sup>31</sup> Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 251.

leading Amanda Vickery to call for a radical reassessment of the art produced by women during this period. Her own research not only shows that women were prolific producers of art in the home, but that a career as a professional artist was something open to women. Mrs Hannah Robertson (1724-1800), a widow who made a living by teaching and selling handicrafts, is a case in point, with Vickery noting how Robertson ‘recommended a wide craft knowledge as a hedge against adversity’.<sup>32</sup> Robertson, a genteel woman who had herself fallen into poverty, was living testament to the advice that ‘any woman capable of painting, japanning, gum-flowers, pongs, &c. will always find employment among fashionable people, and especially in towns of trade and commerce’.<sup>33</sup> In her portrayal of a heroine who is able to support herself by selling her art, Radcliffe positions Ellena amongst such women who are able to use art as ‘a hedge against adversity’, claiming the arts as a legitimate source of income. Furthermore, Ellena Rosalba shares a name with the Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757), whose pastel portraits were highly sought after by the elite.<sup>34</sup>

Ellena’s status as a professional artist is unusual but not unique in novels of the period. Financial need in the absence of a male protector is the driving motivation in this case and others identified, including Margaret Holford’s *First Impressions; Or, The Portrait* (1801). In this Minerva Press novel the orphaned heroine, Maria Clive blushes when Mrs Brown the housekeeper exclaims: “Why, you have a fortune in your own fingers!”<sup>35</sup> Maria’s miniature copy of the Romney portrait she admires is so skilful that Mrs Brown questions why she does not use her artistic talent to earn a living rather than continue in the uncertain

<sup>32</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 237.

<sup>33</sup> Hannah Robertson, *The Young Ladies School of Arts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Edinburgh: Printed by Wal. Ruddiman for Mrs. Robinson, 1767), p. ix.

<sup>34</sup> Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757) is considered one of the leading artists of Italian Rococo. Although she is remembered for her pastel portraits of elite figures, including Horace Walpole, she began her career producing patterns for lace-making. Taught by her mother in order to help support her family, she was forced to diversify when there was a downturn in sales, and only then began to paint miniature portraits on snuff box lids.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Holford, *First Impressions; Or, The Portrait* (London: Minerva Press, 1801), p. 156. Sharing a title with Jane Austen’s working draft for *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), it is likely that Austen was aware of this novel and responds to the heroine’s interpretation of an idealized portrait of her master with the gallery scene at Pemberley, where Elizabeth Bennet views Mr Darcy’s portrait.

position she occupies in the household between companion and governess. For a lady, albeit one of uncertain origins, to seek financial independence from the public display of her talent would be considered decidedly unfeminine. In her *Strictures On Female Education* (1799) Hannah More warns against such display with the lesson: ‘Teach her that the world is not a stage for the display of superficial or even shining talents, but for the strict and sober exercise of fortitude, temperance, meekness, faith, diligence and self-denial.’<sup>36</sup> In contrast, Priscilla Wakefield’s *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798) radically suggests that ‘women whose refinement of manners unfit them for any occupation of a sordid menial kind’,<sup>37</sup> could turn to a feminine art, such as painting, to support themselves and argues against the degradation of ‘the female who engages in the concerns of commerce’.<sup>38</sup> When Holford’s heroine, Maria, has to flee the predatory advances of her suitor, her artwork is something she takes with her owing to its potential to be sold. In the anonymously-penned novel *Montrose; or, the Gothic Ruin* (1799) the accomplished heroine Louisa dutifully accompanies her father to debtors’ prison, from where she sells the ornamented baskets she is able to produce to ease their situation.<sup>39</sup> Art in these novels is presented as a means for women to earn money when men cannot be depended upon. However, it is telling that Jane Austen’s artist heroines of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) never resort to selling their wares. Even when reduced to the condition of genteel poverty, Elinor Dashwood never considers selling her artwork to ease the situation. Mary Hays’s *Victim of Prejudice* (1799) shows a darker side to the life of the woman artist. Hays’s novel is concerned with the difficulties women face in trying to earn an independent living. Although Mary finds employment as a flower painter, she is subject to the sexual advances of her employer due to unfounded

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<sup>36</sup> More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 356.

<sup>37</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> Anon, *Montrose; Or, The Gothic Ruin* (London: printed for R. Dutton, 1799).

rumours about her reputation.<sup>40</sup> With the female arts of millinery and mantua-making associated with prostitution, selling one's art could all too easily be seen as selling oneself. In *The Italian* it is Ellena's anonymity in the marketplace that protects her modesty:

Ellena could have endured poverty, but not contempt: and it was to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her, that she had so cautiously concealed from it a knowledge of the industry, which did honor to her character.<sup>41</sup>

With the embroidery she produces 'disposed of to the nuns of a neighbouring convent, who sold them on to Neapolitan ladies, that visited their grate, at a very high advantage',<sup>42</sup> she is one step removed from the business of selling, and thus from the charge of degrading her reputation. Convents were a legitimate place for acquiring such items and the fact that Ellena's work commands the highest price shows that her work is valued for the skill displayed.

Ellena's key talent lies in copying, and in his biography of Radcliffe, Rictor Norton suggests that Ellena's particular artistic talents are based upon those of Radcliffe's own aunt, Elizabeth, who drew copies from the antique for Wedgwood china. The family connection to Wedgwood runs deeper still, with Radcliffe's uncle Bentley a partner in the business, whilst her father sold their wares from the showroom in Bath. Norton, therefore, believes that her portrayal of commerce 'may reflect some of the feelings experienced by the daughter of a tradesman' as he states that: 'the author goes to some length to defend 'the means of making this industry profitable without being dishonourable.'<sup>43</sup> The same anxiety is evident in the short memoir of Radcliffe prefixed to *Gaston De Blondeville* (1826), when it is stated that she

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice*, ed. by Eleanor Ty, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 13

<sup>42</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 44.

had a ‘natural repugnance to authorship’.<sup>44</sup> In this text, likely composed by Thomas Noon Talfourd under the guidance of Radcliffe’s husband, William, there is a careful attempt to secure her posthumous legacy as a woman quietly and contentedly confined to her ‘domestic duties and pleasures’.<sup>45</sup> In terms of her education, she is presented as a suitably accomplished female: ‘She was instructed in all womanly accomplishments after the fashion of the time, but was not exercised in the classics’.<sup>46</sup> However, Radcliffe’s keen interest in art is evident from the extracts of her travel journals quoted in the memoir, as she records the great works of Van Dyke, Rubens, Holbein, and Claude seen on visits to Blenheim Palace, Warwick Castle, and Knole.

Furthermore, the family connection to Wedgwood means that Radcliffe would have seen first-hand the mounting popularity of copies taken from the antique. According to Thora Brylowe, the process of pottery production invented by Josiah Wedgwood ‘produced shifts in meaning that destabilized the very notion of originality.’<sup>47</sup> Brylowe suggests that Wedgwood’s marketing of his ‘original copies’ elevated the status of his work from the realms of mechanical reproduction to be considered fine art. Taking the Portland vase as a case study, Brylowe argues that the cultural capital of the copies eclipsed that of the original, citing references to Wedgwood replicas in paintings and poetry to support her claim. Despite the demand, copies were not valued as fine art by the Royal Academy. With copying considered a suitably feminine pastime, Radcliffe’s portrayal of Ellena retains female modesty, whilst simultaneously working to raise the status of the copy through the reference to Herculaneum.

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<sup>44</sup>[Thomas Noon Talfourd], *A Memoir of the Author, with Extracts from her Journals*, prefixed to Ann Radcliffe, *Gaston De Blondville; Or, The Court of Henry III. Keeping Festival in Ardenne, A Romance* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1826), p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Talfourd, Memoir*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Talfourd, Memoir*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Thora Brylowe, ‘Original Copies: Wedgwood’s Portland Vase in Paint and Poem’, *Romantic Art in Practice: Cultural Work and the Sister Arts, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 36-64 (p. 37).

### Ellena's Copies from Herculaneum

In *The Italian*, Ellena has produced copies from the excavated ruins of Herculaneum, which now adorn the Palace di Vivaldi. Her work is admired within the very building to which she cannot gain admittance, being considered an unsuitable wife for a Marchese's son. The position of the drawings within the private space of the Marchesa's cabinet is illustrative of their value as a prized possession, whilst the family, Vivaldi included, have no idea that Ellena has produced these works: 'He little thought, that a beautiful robe, which he had often seen his mother wear, was worked by Ellena; nor that some copies from the antique, which ornamented a cabinet of the Vivaldi palace, were drawn by her hand'.<sup>48</sup> Without an accomplished female in the family, they have had to buy in such items. The fact that Ellena's work has been produced anonymously allows it to be appraised purely on the aesthetic value placed upon Neapolitan cultural heritage, as opposed to the name or gender of the artist. Anonymity, therefore, prevents a judgement being formed based on personal opinion of the artist, sexual attraction, or pity. The veil of modesty around Ellena's work combats Hannah More's concern about the display of talent and allows her to protect her reputation.

The copies in the possession of the Marchese are believed to be the only set of copies produced, the rarity increasing their value. However, Vivaldi recognizes more copies in progress when he voyeuristically surveys Ellena's apartments, and identifies her as the artist of both sets:

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<sup>48</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 13.

A drawing, half-finished, of a dancing nymph remained on a stand, and he immediately understood that her hand had traced the lines. It was a copy from Herculaneum, and, though a copy, was touched with the spirit of original genius. The light steps appeared almost to move, and the whole figure displayed the airy lightness of exquisite grace. Vivaldi perceived this to be one of a set that ornamented the apartment, and observed with surprise, that they were the particular subjects, which adorned his father's cabinet, and which he had understood to be the only copies permitted from the originals in the Royal Museum.<sup>49</sup>

Looking back to antiquity inserts her work into an admired artistic tradition, but alluding to the control exerted by the King of Naples regarding the treasures unearthed at Herculaneum significantly increases the status of Ellena's copies. A report of 'Remarks on the principal Paintings found in the subterraneous City of Herculaneum', presented to the Royal Society and circulated in *The Magazine of Magazines* (December 1750), emphasized the prestige of the finds:

Don *Francesco de la Vega*, a painter, whom the king of *Naples* sent from *Rome*, as one of the best hands, to take draughts of these paintings, told me, that if Raphael were now alive, he would be glad to study the drawings, and perhaps take lessons from them.<sup>50</sup>

Not only were the paintings being unearthed preserved in pristine condition, but showed great artistic skill, especially in terms of anatomy. Copies were in demand to circulate the discoveries, but Goran Blix's research into the excavations undertaken from 1738 highlights the tight security around the digs, noting that 'restrictions on the right to draw antiquities ensured the king's monopoly on the prestigious finds.'<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Nancy H. Ramage records how paintings were sometimes destroyed as a means of maintaining control, even when this was contrary to higher orders, as it was 'a practice that had been initiated to prevent

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<sup>49</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Blondeau and Stack, 'Remarks on the principal Paintings found in the subterraneous City of Herculaneum, and at present in the Possession of the king of Naples', *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)*, Vol. 46 (1749 - 1750), 14-21 (p. 17); reprinted in *The Magazine of Magazines* (London: 1750), pp. 509-13.

<sup>51</sup> Goran Blix, *From Paris to Pompeii: French Romanticism and the Cultural Politics of Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 11.

other parties from getting their hands on those paintings that had not been removed.<sup>52</sup> William Hamilton, the British envoy at the Bourbon Court of Naples from 1764 to 1800, was concerned about unethical archaeological practices, including the removal of paintings and inscriptions without proper records being made, but nevertheless exploited his position to amass his own collection. Blix notes that ‘Charles III deflected criticism while courting interest in the finds by appointing a fifteen-member Academia Ercolanese’, who were to study and publish accurate plates of the artefacts.<sup>53</sup> However, the vigilance of the guards was a subject of contention amongst Grand Tourists hoping to record their visit. Mrs Miller was one intrepid traveller whose curiosity led her to climb a ladder in order to peer through a window of a recently excavated dwelling, only for her to fall through the opening. ‘Mrs. Miller’s Travels’, published in the *Weekly Miscellany* (July 1778), records the difficulties she faced visiting Herculaneum under scrutiny which forbade sketching:

I wished to have taken a sketch of this house, and its little garden; but the Officers, soldiers, and spies, appointed to attend and watch strangers, made that impossible, as it is their business to see that no observations they can prevent should be made: they followed us closely, so that we could rarely evade their vigilance and impertinent curiosity.<sup>54</sup>

‘A Letter from Naples, by a Lady, to her Friend’, published in the *Sentimental Magazine* (January 1777), reports similarly strict conditions at the royal museum at Portici, housing the most prestigious finds:

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<sup>52</sup> Nancy H. Ramage, ‘Goods, Graves, and Scholars: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Archaeologists in Britain and Italy’, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 96.4 (October 1992), 653-61 (p. 655).

<sup>53</sup> Blix, *From Paris to Pompeii*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Mrs. Miller, ‘An Account of Herculaneum, taken from Mrs. Miller’s Travels’, *Weekly Miscellany: or, Instructive Entertainer* (Sherborne: R. Goadby, 1778), pp. 363-68 (p. 367).

There is a work published by order of government, which is already increased to seven or eight large folio volumes, embellished with engravings representing the various articles in this collection; but it is not yet near completed, on which account no person who visits this cabinet is permitted to take any sketch, note, or memorandum upon the spot.<sup>55</sup>

The publication the writer refers to is *Le Antichita di Ercolano*; the official compilation of fine plates issued between 1757 and 1792 by Charles III's Academia Ercolanese. Of course, even this level of control did not prevent the looting of artefacts or the illegal circulation of drawings, but the highly moral stance of Radcliffe's heroine would prevent her from engaging in illicit activity, suggesting that Ellena is granted a highly prestigious role in producing the few copies permitted. Therefore, not only does Ellena's work associate her with the artists most skilled in producing precise copies as a historical record, but Vivaldi's identification of 'original genius' in the work argues against Reynolds's sense of the copy and suggests that Ellena possesses the talents of a true artist.

Even though Ellena appears to have traced the lines of an antique original, her half-finished drawing of the nymph is not a slavish copy, so much as an imitation inspired by antiquity that displays her own imaginative flair. Such copies became fashionable in decorative schemes, leading *The Universal Magazine* (February 1779) to publish a detailed description of one nymph uncovered at Herculaneum, speculating as to her identity and including a copy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Anon, 'A Letter from Naples, by a Lady, to her Friend', *Sentimental Magazine; Or, General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment*, Vol. 5 (London: January 1777), pp. 6-7 (p. 6).

<sup>56</sup> Anon, 'Explanation of the annexed Copy of No. XXII. of the Paintings found among the Ruins of Herculaneum', *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (London: J. Stratford, February 1779), pp. 88-90.

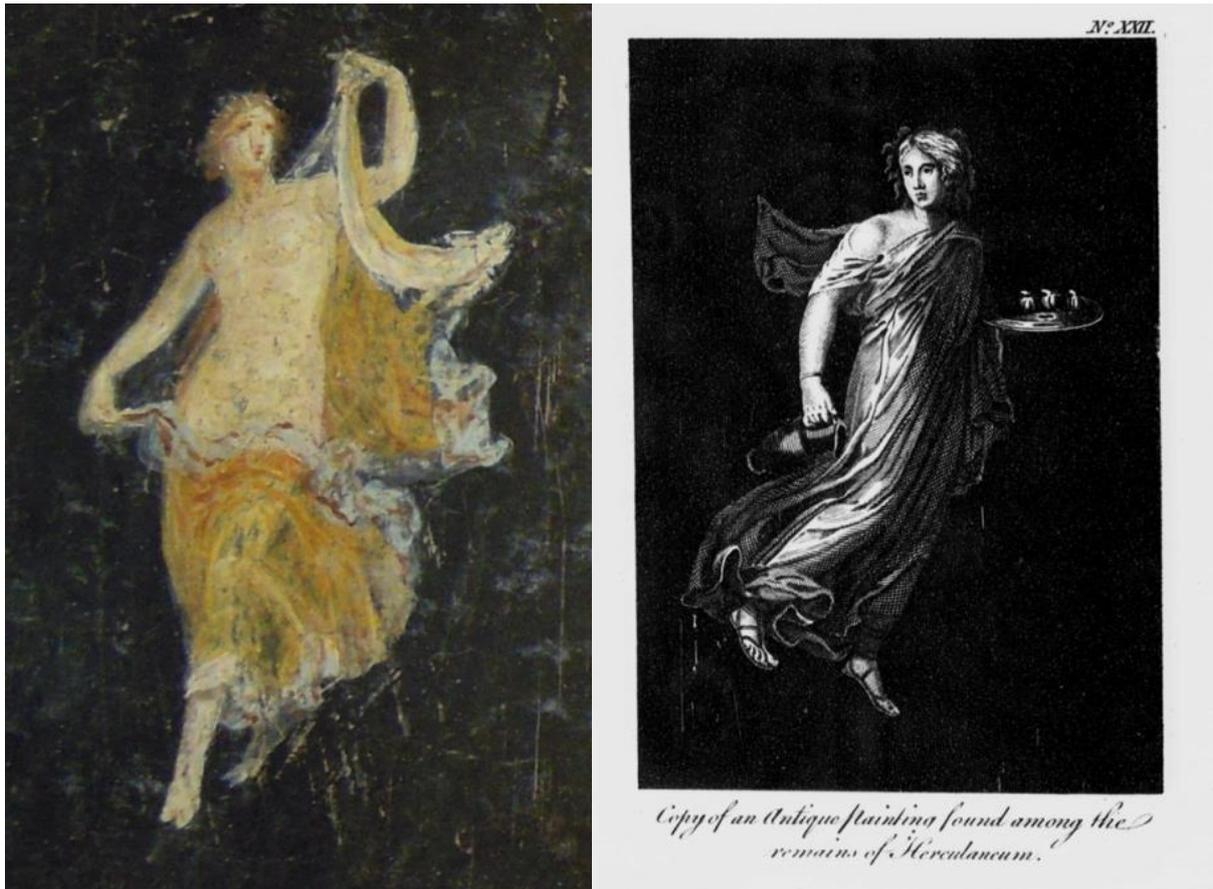


Figure 3.2 (L): Anon example of a dancing nymph from a series held at Naples Archaeological Museum, No. 9297; Figure 3.3 (R): Anon, No. XXII. *Copy of an Antique Painting Found Among the Excavations of Herculaneum*, as reproduced in *The Universal Magazine* (1779).

We can get a further idea of Ellena's drawing by looking at the art of Angelica Kauffman. When comparing an image of a dancing nymph from the collection held at Naples Archaeological Museum (pictured above) with the painting *A Sleeping Nymph Watched by a Shepherd* (c. 1780) by Kauffman (overleaf), the similarities in the composition and colouring suggest she has imitated the antique original, using it as a guide, without producing an exact copy.



Figure 3.4: Angelica Kauffman, *A Sleeping Nymph Watched by a Shepherd* (c. 1780), V&A, London, Museum No. 23-1886, image © V&A.<sup>57</sup>

### Angelica Kauffman's Imitative Technique

Angelica Kauffman is often described as a child prodigy. Having been trained by her father, who was a travelling artist, she managed to forge a successful career tackling the prestigious subjects of history painting in spite of the limitations imposed upon women. Kauffman displayed keen commercial awareness that saw her fashionable neoclassical designs replicated on items of furniture, porcelain, and even fans. Germaine Greer's assertion that if success is measured on the reproduction of an image 'few painters of either sex can have been more successful than Angelica Kauffman',<sup>58</sup> reinforces the message that there are

<sup>57</sup> Composed as an illustration for a poem written by Francis Davidson (c. 1620), and compiled by Thomas Percy in his anthology, *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765).

<sup>58</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1982), p. 80.

different means of judging success. This is especially relevant given that a woman's art will emerge from a different context.

Unable to paint from nude models, Kauffman's studies from life were restricted to exposed arms and legs. However, her skill in anatomy left her open to criticism, as alluded to by Roger Shanahan in his satirical review of Kauffman's painting of Cupid and Venus displayed at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1779. Shanahan states that he 'cannot avoid expressing [my] astonishment at such extraordinary correctness flowing from the pencil of a Lady', but accounts for her skill in anatomy as one of her 'innate accomplishments' as he is 'confident that the usual modes necessary to acquire a competent knowledge in that art, are utterly incompatible with the chastity of a female; particularly Mrs. Kauffman.'<sup>59</sup> Sarcastic speculation on chastity aside, Shanahan does make an observation that shows Kauffman's ability to make her own mark on classical subjects, noting: 'There is a singular delicacy in the principal figure; and the profile of her face at once mark the Grecian original, and the hand of the Artist.'<sup>60</sup> This assessment fits Coleridge's conception of mimetic artistic practice, in that an imitation bears the consciousness of the artist, whereas the copy does not.<sup>61</sup>

Like Ellena in *The Italian*, Kauffman largely developed her talent by copying from classical figures, and between July 1763 and April 1764 she spent time in Naples producing copies from the works of art housed in the Galleria di Capodimonte. This public practice is something depicted in Anne Thackeray's novel, *Miss Angel* (1875), which presents Kauffman's life as a love story. Before responding to the rumours that Joshua Reynolds was more than a mentor, Thackeray describes Kauffman struggling to paint copies to order. Although she attracts the attention of patrons and admirers as she works, the originals on

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<sup>59</sup> Roger Shanahan, *The Exhibition, or, A Second Anticipation: Being Remarks on the Principal Works to be Exhibited next Month at the Royal Academy* (London: Richardson and Urquhart, 1779), pp. 24-25.

<sup>60</sup> Shanahan, *The Exhibition*, p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of Coleridge's lectures on imitation, see Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010).

display before her seem to glow, and it feels impossible for her to do them justice: ‘there she stood, pale and discouraged, an inadequate little copyist, blinking at the sun.’<sup>62</sup> Her friend and fellow artist, Antonio Zucchi tells her she is wasting her time even attempting such commissions. Even though Kauffman progresses to paint royal portraits and allegorical works, lauded by fashionable society, Thackeray suggests that her reputation has been shaped by being ‘overpraised’ as well as wrongly critiqued: ‘My poor Angel all her life was used to praise and blame, to be accused of faults she never committed, to be admired of qualities she scarcely possessed.’<sup>63</sup> After acknowledging the failings of Kauffman’s work, describing her as ‘no inspired painter of gods and men’,<sup>64</sup> Thackeray does concede that ‘her work is bright with a womanly sympathy and transparence, a delicacy of rendering which holds its own even now.’<sup>65</sup> If Kauffman’s strength lies in ‘womanly sympathy’ her work should not automatically be judged as a success or a failure in relation to the male standard. Amanda Vickery’s recent study of Kauffman’s reputation makes a similar assessment in stating that: ‘Her art may not always be considered first-rate, but her brand management was superb.’<sup>66</sup> Thackeray’s own focus is on showing the dangers of false friends, placing emphasis on Kauffman’s relationship with a dashing imposter, who posed as a Swedish count in order to dupe her into marriage and exploit her influence at court. Despite being embroiled in such a scandal, Kauffman’s reputation largely remained unscathed. For Vickery, this is evidence of expert brand management which positioned Kauffman as the embodiment of virtuous womanhood in art and life: ‘Certainly her depiction of so many grieving, wronged and deserted women chimed with her own catastrophe and perhaps ennobled her scandal.’<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie, *Miss Angel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Thackeray, *Miss Angel*, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Thackeray, *Miss Angel*, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> Thackeray, *Miss Angel*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Amanda Vickery, ‘Branding Angelica: Reputation Management in Late Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43.1 (2020), 3-24 (p. 19).

<sup>67</sup> Vickery, ‘Branding Angelica’, p. 18.

Amongst Kauffman's influential circle of patrons and friends was the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who was an advocate of the neoclassical style, and studied the antiquities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in order to discriminate between Greek art and Roman copies. In his essay *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* published in 1755, Winckelmann argues that whilst Greek art stands at the pinnacle of artistic achievement, an imitation can be equal to, if not greater than the original source material. He states: 'The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients', and elaborates: 'What is imitated, if handled with reason, may assume another nature, as it were, and become one's own.'<sup>68</sup> By looking back it is possible to create something new in that surpassing what is imitated makes the work unique. In a self-portrait drawn by Kauffman in 1771, she inscribes the word 'imitatio' on her headband to claim this imaginative form of imitation as a hallmark of her work.



**Figure 3.5: Angelica Kauffman, *Self-Portrait as Imitatio* (1771), graphite on laid paper 20 x 17 cm, Yale Center for British Art (Wikimedia Commons).**

<sup>68</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1987), p. 5.

Although Reynolds initially diminishes the act of copying in his *Discourses*, the boundary he draws between what constitutes a slavish copy as opposed to an imaginative imitation is by no means clear cut. His *Sixth Discourse*, dedicated to topic of imitation, acknowledges the importance for artists to look back and ‘accommodate’ the work of their predecessors within their own, as nothing comes from nothing:

It must be acknowledged that the works of the moderns are more the property of their authors; he who borrows an idea from an antient, or even from a modern artist not in his contemporary, and so accommodates it to his own work, that it makes a part of it, with no seam or joining appearing, can hardly be accused of plagiarism: the poets practice this kind of borrowing, without reserve.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Reynolds justifies his own practice of imitating the ancients through allusion to the sister arts; if a poet can ‘borrow’ from the ancients and retain ownership of their work, then so can a painter. Working in the knowledge that the society portraits he was known for ranked below the more prestigious Biblical and allegorical scenes depicted in history painting, Reynolds blended portraiture with history painting to create what has become known as the Grand Style. Reynolds believed that he was pioneering a style that was greater than the sum of its parts, stating that: ‘When this is accomplished to a high degree, it becomes in some sort a rival to that style which we have fixed as the highest.’<sup>70</sup> In *The Italian* Radcliffe similarly elevates the status of the copy in a way which self-reflexively raises the value of her own work as a woman writer. However, Reynolds was subsequently accused of relying too heavily on poses taken from the Old Masters, most notably by Nathaniel Hone in his painting *The Conjuror* (1775), which shows an old man selecting ideas from a flurry of famous prints.

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<sup>69</sup> Reynolds, ‘Discourse VI’ (December 1774), *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by John Burnet (London: Carpenter, 1842), pp. 89-111 (p.105).

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, ‘Discourse V’ (December 1772), *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by John Burnet (London: Carpenter, 1842), pp. 73-88 (p. 87).



Figure 3.6: Nathaniel Hone, Oil Sketch for *The Conjuror* (1775), oil paint on wood 575 × 819 mm, Tate, London, Ref. No. T00938, digital image © Tate, image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported).<sup>71</sup>

Whether the artist is imitating art or nature they need to add to what they see before them. Greek art is able to represent ideal beauty because the artists did not refer to one defective model, but selected parts. According to accounts given by Cicero and Pliny, when Zeuxis could not find a model beautiful enough for his painting of Helen of Troy he selected the features from five different models to create an ideal.<sup>72</sup> Angelica Kauffman depicts the story here by including herself as one of the five women.

<sup>71</sup> The image of naked figure in black stockings was painted out of the background in the final version (now in the collection of The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin), after complaints from Angelica Kauffman that it was intended to mock her.

<sup>72</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, II. I; Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 35. Ch. 36.



**Figure 3.7:** Angelica Kauffman, *Zeuxis Selecting Models for Helen of Troy* (c.1778), image courtesy of Annmary Brown Memorial Collection, Brown University, Providence, R.I.

Kauffman does not merely represent herself as one of the models, or even as a Muse inspiring the creative process. She positions herself right behind the artist, taking up his brush. The canvas in the painting is even signed *A. Kauffman*. In this painting, she is both the art and the artist. Kauffman, thus, illustrates her awareness of how the woman artist is judged as an aesthetic object, as discussed in the previous chapter, whilst at the same time claiming her right to the occupation. In *The Italian*, Ellena's careful concealment of both her creativity and commercial involvement represents an alternate strategy to negotiate the way in which she would be judged as a woman artist.

### Ellena's Art Under the Male Gaze

Even when modestly veiled Ellena's skill still attracts notice, and Vivaldi is initially enthralled solely by hearing her sing. However, Vivaldi's subsequent voyeuristic appraisal, first of Ellena's artwork, followed by her physical appearance, illustrates the sexual allure of the arts:

She still held the lute, but no longer awakened it, and seemed lost for a moment, to every surrounding object. Her fine hair was negligently bound up in a silk net, and some tresses that had escaped it, played on her neck, and round her beautiful countenance, which now was not even partially concealed by a veil. The light drapery of her dress, her whole figure, air, and attitude, were such as she might have been copied for a Grecian nymph.<sup>73</sup>

As Vivaldi gazes upon her the action freezes and he appraises her aesthetically, as though she is an inanimate painting or a statue. Embodied as a work of art, Ellena herself becomes a potential source from which a copy could be taken. Noting the blend of music and image, Jakub Lipski positions Ellena as an embodiment of the sister arts ideal, describing her as 'a transfiguration of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music and an archetypal female artist'.<sup>74</sup> However, sanctifying Ellena does not fully account for her sexualization as an art object. James Uden believes that the figure of the dancing nymph has been 'deliberately chosen' as a familiar point of reference with erotic associations.<sup>75</sup> The dancing nymphs of Herculaneum not only became a popular design motif, replicated by Wedgwood, but inspired Emma Hamilton's 'Attitudes'. A link between Emma Hamilton and Radcliffe's heroine has been observed by Uden in that Ellena is mistaken as 'a lower-class woman seducing the young

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<sup>73</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Jakub Lipski, 'Ann Radcliffe and the sister arts ideal', in *The Enchantress of Words, Sounds and Images: Anniversary Essays on Ann Radcliffe (1764 - 1823)*, ed. by Jakub Lipski and Jacek Mydla (Washington, DC: Academica Press, 2015), pp. 3-20 (p. 17). Lipski notes that Radcliffe may have been familiar with the images of Saint Cecilia painted by Guido Reni and Domenichino given that she references both artists in her fiction.

<sup>75</sup> James Uden, 'Ann Radcliffe's Classical Remembrances', *Spectres of Antiquity: Classical Literature and the Gothic, 1740-1830* (Forthcoming, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 90-122 (p. 116). Note page references may differ slightly in the final publication.

noble in order to marry advantageously'.<sup>76</sup> For Uden, the significance of the references to ancient art lies not in revealing Ellena's skill and status as an artist: 'Instead, the image of Ellena *as* the Herculaneum nymph sets the pattern for misplaced eroticism that will threaten to entrap and destroy her throughout the novel.'<sup>77</sup> Ellena is effectively caught between competing paradigms of femininity: the saint and the whore. Artistic practice and artistic precedent influence both views, but even if Ellena appears like the nymphs she draws, this does not reflect the extent of her character. When Ellena and her nymph are seen as one and the same, the antique past clouds the representation of the present. With Vivaldi's aesthetic judgement shaped by classical ideals, he is solely reliant on the arts to form an assessment of Ellena's character, leading the sound of her lute to merge with the sound of her voice in his imagination: 'He trembled as he took up the lute she had been accustomed to touch, and, when he awakened the chords, her own voice seemed to speak.'<sup>78</sup> Just as the eruption of 79 AD preserved a moment in time, complete with traces of everyday life, objects touched by Ellena, including her drawings, retain a trace of her presence for Vivaldi and seem to stand in for her.

For Sophie Thomas, Pompeii and Herculaneum are 'imprinted sites' owing to the preservation of a precise moment in time within the fallen ash. Furthermore, the collections of prints, which Thomas refers to as 'paper museums', meant that 'Pompeii and Herculaneum thus circulated extensively in print, in productions that served to present antiquity in the form of ideal (and idealizing) collections.'<sup>79</sup> Thomas charts how the replicated images of Pompeii and Herculaneum gain new meaning through 'their deployment in quite another space and

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<sup>76</sup> Uden, 'Ann Radcliffe's Classical Remembrances', p. 117.

<sup>77</sup> Uden, 'Ann Radcliffe's Classical Remembrances', p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 31.

<sup>79</sup> Sophie Thomas, 'Pompeii, the Body, and the Imprint of the Ancient World', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 33.3 (2017), 303-12 (p. 303).

time'.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, works of art, like Ellena's nymphs, are self-reflexive in that the present shapes the view of the past.

Ellena's drawings of nymphs represent an idealized reanimation of the past similar to the practice of William Gell and John Peter Gandy in *Pompeiana* (1817-19), whereby living figures are reintroduced into prints to populate the scenes of 'restored' Pompeii.<sup>81</sup> This practice stands in contrast to other verbal and visual accounts of Pompeii and Herculaneum which include the skeletal remains of the dead bodies unearthed, as in William Hamilton's *Account of the Discoveries at Pompeii communicated to The Society of Antiquaries of London* (1777).<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Mrs Miller's Travelogue, quoted earlier, swiftly moves from describing the fortunate discovery of Herculaneum and the antique statues, mosaics, and frescos, to the very real human loss of life, noting: 'In the window of a room, lately cleared out, is the skeleton of a woman, who seems to have been endeavouring to escape.'<sup>83</sup> Although this aspect of Herculaneum is absent in Radcliffe's portrayal, the idea of the resurfacing or uncovering of the past is prevalent in terms of the discoveries Ellena makes regarding her parentage.

Vivaldi's comparison of Ellena to a 'Grecian nymph' also mirrors the description of Antonia in the opening pages of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796): 'Her features were hidden by a thick veil; But struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus.'<sup>84</sup> The allusion to the Venus de' Medici, not only one of the world's most frequently replicated antiquities, but a marble Roman copy of an original Greek bronze, illustrates the

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas, 'Pompeii, the Body, and the Imprint of the Ancient World', p. 305.

<sup>81</sup> William Gell and John Peter Gandy, *Pompeiana; The Topography, Edifices, and Ornaments of Pompeii* (London: printed by Davison, 1817-19).

<sup>82</sup> William Hamilton, *Account of the Discoveries at Pompeii communicated to The Society of Antiquaries of London* (London: Printed by W. Bowyer and J. Nichols, 1777).

<sup>83</sup> Mrs. Miller, 'An Account of Herculaneum', p. 366.

<sup>84</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

prevalence of artistic imitation. Although Radcliffe's comparison lacks the specificity of Lewis's allusion to the Medicean Venus, she uses classical art as a means of responding to Lewis's scandalous novel, the genesis of which he claimed originated from reading Radcliffe's work. However, unlike Lewis, Radcliffe presents a self-sufficient, self-aware heroine who is more than an object of the male gaze.

Although Ellena resists being judged sexually, she is still aware of how she could be seen and actively attempts to control how she is perceived by withdrawing behind a modest veil of concealment, and it is in what Radcliffe terms the 'veil of retirement' that she experiences the sense of tranquillity required for artistic creativity. Ellena's self-awareness thus differs from that of the knowing coquette who stages the appearance of accomplishment to attract male attention, as discussed in Chapter Two. As noted by Ada Sharpe, Ellena gains agency from her art, both in terms of her commercial engagement and the way in which she is able to create her own mental space by turning to her accomplishments; in times of unrest 'Ellena turns to that occupation that she knows will restore her sense of self-sufficiency and autonomous self-expression'.<sup>85</sup> However, Andrew Warren identifies a double bind in that veiled modesty 'secures Ellena's neutral tranquillity and her position as a self-sufficient bourgeois artist at the same time that it serves as a fetish object for male desire that threatens that tranquil self-sufficiency'.<sup>86</sup> In her work on the morality of the spectator, Fiona Price identifies that Radcliffe 'connects spectacle and display with selfishness and corruption'.<sup>87</sup> Speaking of Fenwick's novel *Secresy* (1795), Price suggests that 'knowledge of the world, particularly of the corruption of the fashionable gaze, is necessary for clear, moral vision'.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ada Sharpe, 'Orphan, Embroiderer, Insect, Queen: The "Elegant and Ingenius" Art of Being in Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1796)', *European Romantic Review*, 23.2 (2012), 123-40 (p. 133).

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Warren, 'Designing and Undrawing Veils: Anxiety and Authorship in Radcliffe's *The Italian*', *The Eighteenth Century*, 54.4 (2013), 521-78 (p. 530).

<sup>87</sup> Fiona Price, "'Myself creating what I saw': The Morality of the Spectator in Eighteenth-Century Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 8.2 (2006), 1-17 (p. 8).

<sup>88</sup> Price, "'Myself creating what I saw'", p. 9.

Applying this idea to *The Italian*, Ellena's understanding of the male gaze gives her such moral insight. As quoted earlier: 'it was to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her, that she had so cautiously concealed from it a knowledge of the industry, which did honor to her character.'<sup>89</sup> Ellena is still able to achieve a sense of tranquillity from her work even if it does serve the dual purpose Warren identifies.

Being trapped by the male gaze does not prevent her achieving transcendence from art. Transcendence is not presented as dependent on status, but as something for the pure of heart, as the Marchesa's evil thoughts distort her perception of her surroundings:

It seemed scarcely possible that misery could inhabit so enchanting an abode; yet the Marchesa was wretched amidst all these luxuries of nature and art, which would have perfected the happiness of an innocent mind! Her heart was possessed by evil passions, and all her perceptions were distorted and discoloured by them, which, like a dark magician, had power to change the fairest scenes into those of gloom and desolation.<sup>90</sup>

Vivaldi, in contrast, is not presented as having such evil thoughts, but Robert Miles suggests that he 'expresses his dominance by wishing to peer beneath Ellena's veil.'<sup>91</sup> For Miles, 'looking is not an innocent activity. And that is because there is always a mismatch in power and status between those who look, and those who are looked upon'.<sup>92</sup> Vivaldi's knowledge of art, particularly the composition of such wild landscapes as depicted by Salvator Rosa, is another way in which he is able to exert his power over others.

Viewing the world as art allows Vivaldi to cunningly articulate his suspicions that Schedoni is the mysterious figure he has seen at the fortress of Paluzzi without overtly challenging the monk:

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<sup>89</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 13.

<sup>90</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 337.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 171.

<sup>92</sup> Miles, *The Great Enchantress*, p. 171.

‘That arch,’ resumed Vivaldi, his eye still fixed on Schedoni, ‘that arch suspended between two rocks, the one overtopped by the towers of the fortress, the other overshadowed with pine and broad oak, has a fine effect. But a picture of it would want human figures. Now either the grotesque shapes of banditti lurking within the ruin, as if ready to start out upon the traveller, or a friar rolled up in his black garments, just stealing forth from under the shade of the arch, and looking like some supernatural messenger of evil, would finish the piece.’<sup>93</sup>

This description, based upon the type of landscape paintings Radcliffe is famous for alluding to in her work, makes a self-reflexive nod to her own writing technique. Producing an ekphrastic copy of a Salvator Rosa landscape not only positions her as a copyist, but shows the usefulness of such artistic allusion. For Alice Labourg, the paintings of Rosa, Claude, and Domenichino alluded to lie like ‘a virtual palimpsest, ‘under’ Radcliffe’s picture.’ What she describes as Radcliffe’s ‘metapictorial’ technique, referencing the names of artists and describing scenes which recall their works, allows the reader to complete the picture from their own knowledge and places the writer and painter on equal terms.<sup>94</sup> Vivaldi, however, does not maintain hold of his position of power, and loses his aesthetically charged gaze when he is later blindfolded by the Inquisition. Miles suggests this ‘veiling’ represents a role reversal, with Vivaldi put in the place of the suffering heroine. Blindfolded, ‘Vivaldi is forced to submit to the gaze of others, in the way that formerly the heroines were forced to’.<sup>95</sup> In feminizing Vivaldi, Radcliffe balances out the more masculine aspects of Ellena’s character.

In the review for *The Italian* published in *The Monthly Mirror*, the critic relies on a familiar metaphor between sister arts to assert that the characters are ‘very well drawn’, and elaborates that ‘Ellena is an excellent composition of female delicacy and innocence, with a

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<sup>93</sup> Radcliffe, *The Italian*, p. 60.

<sup>94</sup> Alice Labourg, ‘Such a scene as Salvator would have chosen’: Metapictorial naming in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, in *The Enchantress of Words, Sounds and Images: Anniversary Essays on Ann Radcliffe (1764 - 1823)*, ed. by Jakub Lipski and Jacek Mydla (Washington, DC: Academica Press, 2015), pp. 20-51 (pp. 39-40).

<sup>95</sup> Miles, *The Great Enchantress*, p. 172.

manly dignity and firmness'.<sup>96</sup> Radcliffe's composition, combining both male and female traits, is praised, suggesting that she has succeeded in portraying a heroine who actively produces art to earn an independent living, and displays fortitude in sticking to her moral code of beliefs without sacrificing her feminine virtues. Although, for a female artist to be successful, the masculine virtues of dignity and firmness are also required. The critic reviewing the Royal Academy exhibition of 1775 in the *London Chronicle* similarly wrote of Kauffman that 'though a woman' she possesses a 'bold and masculine spirit.'<sup>97</sup> In pursuing art as a profession, women have to negotiate being judged by their gender and physical appearance as much as their skill, but Radcliffe does show that art can be a legitimate means for a talented woman artist to make her own money.

*The Italian* was to be the last of Radcliffe's novels to be published within her lifetime, and at this point in her writing career she had reached the height of her commercial success. Having earned £500 from the sale of the copyright of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) from G.G. and J. Robinson, Radcliffe could command an even higher price for her next novel and went on to secure a sum of £800 from Cadell & Davies for *The Italian* at a time when such amounts were unprecedented.<sup>98</sup> In his biography, *Mistress of Udolpho* (1999), Rictor Norton records that by 1792 William Radcliffe was earning around £274 per annum. Radcliffe's earning power, therefore, eclipsed that of her husband. Rumour inflated the figures further still, with reports circulating that Mrs Radcliffe had in fact sold *The Italian* for £1500.<sup>99</sup> With such value placed on her work it goes some way towards raising the value of the novel, and

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<sup>96</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Mirror*, 3 (March 1797), pp. 155-58, reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, p. 53.

<sup>97</sup> Anon, 'Review of the Royal Academy Exhibition', *London Chronicle*, 4-6 May 1775, quoted in Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (eds.), *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 20. The reviewer particularly comments upon Kauffman's *Despair of Achilles*, one of her seven paintings to be exhibited at the 1775 show.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Elizabeth Inchbald was paid £150 for *Nature and Art* by the Robinsons in 1796, whilst a Minerva Press manuscript could on average earn its author £10-£20.

<sup>99</sup> Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 95.

Norton suggests that Radcliffe actively sought to change publishers, first moving from Hookham's to Robinson's, as an attempt to safe-guard her reputation and improve her literary standing.<sup>100</sup> By presenting a heroine who is able to support herself financially by producing skilled work of 'original genius', Radcliffe not only raises the status of female creativity, but also justifies her own position as a professional woman writer. If, as stated in the biographical sketch prefixed to *Gaston De Blondeville*, Radcliffe was a woman with a 'natural repugnance to authorship' who wished to be 'known only by her works',<sup>101</sup> those works go some way towards dignifying women's work.

The critical response to *The Italian* shows constant uncertainty of how to ascribe value to her work; whether to judge Radcliffe as a novelist whose literary achievements should be weighed in comparison to those of Richardson, Fielding, and Burney, or as an exemplary writer of romance. Arthur Aikin articulated precisely this dilemma in *The Monthly Review*: 'Whatever is perfect in its kind is better than an imperfect and unsuccessful attempts at any thing higher; and judging by this maxim, we consider the present romance as occupying a very distinguished rank among the modern works of fiction.'<sup>102</sup> Whilst Gothic recipes such as 'Terrorist Novel Writing', quoted in the introduction to this chapter, emphasise the tendency for Gothic novelists to imitate or adapt one another's work by reusing the same set of stale motifs, Radcliffe's presentation of a heroine who produces copies of high aesthetic value works to defend her own artistic output as a Gothic writer. Separating imitators, who deftly manage a formula with their own creative input, from unskilled plagiarists, Radcliffe shows how skilled work can still be produced in a less prestigious genre, and in *The Italian* she reconciles the problem of genre distinction by showing the value and prestige in Ellena's artwork.

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<sup>100</sup> Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho*, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> See *Memoir*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>102</sup> Arthur Aikin, *The Monthly Review*, Vol. 22 (March, 1797), pp. 282-84 (p. 283), reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, p. 49.

Rather than an ‘anxiety of influence’, portrayed by Harold Bloom as a battle between male poets struggling to accept their lineage, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley show how writers can willingly draw upon literary influence and use creative links to their advantage. Where Bloom’s proclamation, ‘But nothing is got of nothing’, seems to echo Shelley’s belief that invention ‘does not consist in creating out of void’, he goes on to state that ‘self-appreciation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself’.<sup>103</sup> However, Shelley’s self-awareness enables her to use literary and artistic allusion as a positive means of communicating difference from a starting point of shared experience. Mary Shelley shows how literary allusion can create something new.

### **Artistic & Moral Boundaries in *Frankenstein***

In Walter Scott’s 1818 review of *Frankenstein* published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, he begins by questioning how the work should be categorized: ‘This is a novel,’ he states, ‘or more properly a romantic fiction, of a nature so peculiar, that we ought to describe the species before attempting any account of the individual production.’<sup>104</sup> Scott goes on to write that ‘the work impresses us with a high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression’, and praises *Frankenstein* as ‘a novel which excites new reflections and untried sources of emotion’.<sup>105</sup> For Scott, therefore, Shelley has created something new whilst working within the confines of the novel. This is achieved through literary allusion, as Scott particularly notes that Victor ‘was tempted to consider’ his creature ‘*nearly* in the light of his own vampire let loose from the grave, and destined to destroy all

<sup>103</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> [Walter Scott], ‘Remarks on *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus; A Novel*’, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. II, No. XII: March 1818 (Edinburgh; William Blackwood, 1818), pp. 613-20 (p. 613).

<sup>105</sup> Scott, *Blackwood's*, p. 620.

that was dear to him,' repeating the phrasing used in Shelley's text.<sup>106</sup> Angela Wright has described *Frankenstein* as 'a text that acknowledges its sources' and identifies Victor's own use of 'nearly' in the context of comparing his creature to a vampire as a means of articulating similarity and difference.<sup>107</sup> The vampire provides a literary precedent, yet despite being comparable to Victor's creation, is not quite the same. This example illustrates how Shelley uses literary allusion to create something new. Similarly, the creature cannot find any being like him in the works he reads, alternating between viewing himself as Adam and Lucifer, whilst Victor alludes to *The Divine Comedy* (1308-1320) by describing his creation as: 'a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived'.<sup>108</sup> Responding to the queries of how she 'then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea', the answer Shelley provides combines her propensity to daydream with literary imitation: 'My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator – rather doing as others had done than putting down the suggestions of my own mind.'<sup>109</sup> Although Shelley wrestles with the idea of being a 'close imitator', imitation plays a significant role in the development of her writing. The now infamous ghost story-writing competition proposed by Lord Byron gave Shelley the opportunity to indulge her waking dreams, and write influenced by her extensive reading and the changing world around her. As Shelley states in her 1831 preface to the novel: 'Everything must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase, and that beginning must be linked to something that went before.'<sup>110</sup> Just as literary allusion provides opportunity for creativity, so does artistic imitation. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley presents two very

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<sup>106</sup> My emphasis

<sup>107</sup> Angela Wright, Keynote Address: 'Gothic Recollected in Tranquillity: Mary Shelley and the Art of Remembering, 1814–1830', International Gothic Association Conference: Gothic Hybridities, Manchester Metropolitan University, 1 August 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Shelley, 'Preface' to *Frankenstein*, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Shelley, 'Preface' to *Frankenstein*, p. 8.

different modes of artistic creation, whereby imitation constitutes the moral approach, as exemplified by the contrasting work of Victor Frankenstein and Elizabeth Lavenza.

Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's cousin and destined bride, is described as an artist by choice rather than obligation: 'Elizabeth was not incited to apply herself to drawing, that her companions might not outstrip her; but through the desire of pleasing her aunt, by the representation of some favourite scene done by her own hand.'<sup>111</sup> Her purpose is to please, and she has been educated accordingly, but her taste and talent for drawing is fostered by the pleasure it brings to her family rather than being pursued to encourage praise for her as an accomplished female. Although Elizabeth is imaginative, she does not get swept away by her daydreams and will apply herself to the task in hand, Victor noting that her 'imagination was luxuriant, yet her capability of application was great'.<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth is happy to reproduce what lies before her and, unlike Victor, does not need to uncover the secrets to life itself: 'The world to me was a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own.'<sup>113</sup> This description mirrors that given by Shelley in her 1831 preface as she outlines her development as a writer: 'I was not confined to my own identity, and I could people the hours with creatures far more interesting to me at that age than my own sensations.'<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth is thus aligned with Shelley as a creator who can combine imagination with observation.

Elizabeth is fixed to the Frankenstein family home, whilst Victor comes and goes, leaving her to rely upon her imagination to people her sphere. Victor's neglect also means that Elizabeth is not destined to reproduce, making her art her only progeny. Anne K. Mellor reads *Frankenstein* as a feminist critique of science, arguing that 'this is first and foremost a

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<sup>111</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 21.

<sup>112</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 20.

<sup>113</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Shelley, 'Preface' to *Frankenstein*, p. 6.

book about what happens when a man tries to procreate without a woman.’<sup>115</sup> His mistake lies in his attempt ‘to create a “new species” rather than allowing one to evolve randomly through sexual selection.’<sup>116</sup> Where a good scientist would observe in order to learn, Victor tries to improve upon nature. His lack of sexual interest in Elizabeth is not simply a consequence of his all-consuming obsession with his work, but informs the process.

Changes made in the 1831 edition may alter Elizabeth’s origins to remove the accusation of incest from her relationship with Victor, but the fact that she is presented to him as a gift objectifies her.<sup>117</sup> The reference to her drawing to please is also removed. However, Shelley expands the differentiation between Elizabeth and Victor, emphasizing her delight in observation and contemplation, whilst Victor will not rest until he has the answers he seeks:

She busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets; and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home – the sublime shapes of the mountains; the changes of the seasons; tempest and calm; the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers – she found ample scope for admiration and delight. While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes.<sup>118</sup>

Although Elizabeth is not described drawing what she observes, she still displays the attention to detail of a copyist studying the changing appearance of the natural world. That Victor and Elizabeth are both characterized as artists dramatizes the debate surrounding the divide between the arts and sciences as well as copying and creativity.

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<sup>115</sup> Anne K. Mellor, ‘Making a “monster”’: An Introduction to *Frankenstein* in *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 9-25 (p. 10).

<sup>116</sup> Mellor, ‘Making a “monster”’, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> In the 1818 edition, Elizabeth is the daughter of Victor’s paternal aunt, making them cousins. However, changes made to the 1831 edition see all blood ties removed. Elizabeth is described as the child of an Italian nobleman and German mother, whose death sees her left living with peasants near Lake Como. It is Elizabeth’s beauty that subsequently leads her to being adopted into the Frankenstein household, with Caroline presenting her as a gift to her son, Victor. See Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1831 edition, ed. by M.K. Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 35. Note, unless otherwise stated all other references are taken from the 2008 OUP edition edited by Marilyn Butler, which follows the 1818 text whilst also including a copy of the 1831 preface.

<sup>118</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1831 edition, p. 36.

Joshua Reynolds's comments regarding copying being merely mechanical suggest that anatomical drawing, which aimed at a high degree of realism, should not be considered as fine art. However, anatomical drawing was taught at the Royal Academy and was considered by Reynolds's opponents, including William Hunter, as a skill of equal worth for art and medical students. The anatomist Charles Bell believed that art and anatomy were inseparable, to the extent that his biographer, Amédée Pichot, states: 'Charles Bell the artist is never separated from the anatomist, nor the anatomist from the artist.'<sup>119</sup> The reciprocal relationship of artist and anatomist contextualises Victor's identification of his work as art.

In *The Anatomy of the Human Body* (1801), Charles Bell championed realism over idealization in anatomical drawing and advocated the selection of large 'well marked' parts to aid the artist in their depiction:

Of [any] twenty bodies not one will be found fit for drawing; but still I conceive that we are not to work out a drawing by piecing and adding from notes and preparations; we are to select carefully from a variety of bodies, that [one body] which gives largeness of parts, where the varieties of parts are well marked, and where there is most natural distribution of vessels. In making our drawings of such dissections, let us allow ourselves no license but copy accurately. By noting in the description any little deviation every necessary end is answered.<sup>120</sup>

Carin Berkowitz cites this quotation to illustrate Bell's commitment to copying directly from nature, warts and all, when other anatomists favoured creating 'idealized' or 'normalized' composite drawings.<sup>121</sup> Here, image and text work together. For Bell, producing an exact copy was a form of empirical observation that could train the eye and the hand to work together, as required of the artist as well as the surgeon.

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<sup>119</sup> Amédée Pichot, *The Life and Labours of Sir Charles Bell* (London: Richard Bentley, 1860), p. 101.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Bell, *The Anatomy of the Human Body, Vol. II: Engravings of the Arteries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Carin Berkowitz, *Charles Bell and the Anatomy of Reform* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 66.

Victor selects large parts to help speed his progress, but deviates from Bell in not searching for one body, but piecing together his creature from many different parts: ‘As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large.’<sup>122</sup> There is artistic precedent in Victor’s selection of beautiful parts if we turn back to the story that Zeuxis was forced to use many models to recreate the beauty of Helen of Troy.<sup>123</sup> However, ideal pieces do not make an ideal whole, and rather than create an ideal man, he creates a new species. Victor loses his sight as an artist as he loses pleasure in his work: ‘I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favourite employment.’<sup>124</sup> The description of hard toil recalls Reynolds’s word on the ‘drudgery of copying’,<sup>125</sup> suggesting it is repetitive work, over which he lacks any control or power. However, Victor is not working within the bounds of an artistic imitation.

Shelley’s knowledge of art and the technical process of painting contributes to her work, with artistic and literary creation linked in her mind. Christopher Rovee records that Shelley had attended a painting class with the miniaturist John West at the time she was writing *Frankenstein*,<sup>126</sup> noting that in December 1816 Mary wrote to Percy:

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<sup>122</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 35-36

<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Mansfield argues that this story problematizes Pliny’s conception of art as mimetic, however, Zeuxis does still rely upon parts of nature rather than turn to his imagination. See Elizabeth Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, And Mimesis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>124</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 38.

<sup>125</sup> Reynolds, ‘Discourse II’, p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> Christopher Rovee, ‘Monsters, Marbles, and Miniatures: Mary Shelley’s Reform Aesthetic’, *Studies in the Novel*, 36.2 (Summer 2004), 147-69 (p. 148).

## Sweet Elf

I was awakened this morning by my pretty babe and was dressed time enough to take my lesson from Mr West and (Thank God) finished that tedious ugly picture I have been so long about – I have also finished the 4 Chap. of Frankenstein which is a very long one & I think you would like it.<sup>127</sup>

Chapter Four, of course, features the infamous verbal portrait of the Creature. Recalling the Pygmalion myth, this description of lustrous black hair and pearly white teeth, akin to a blazon, was described by John Wilson Croker in his unfavourable response for the *Quarterly Review* of January 1818 as ‘the account of the animation of the image’,<sup>128</sup> showing how the Creature was seen as a work of art by the readership. That Shelley was painting and writing at the same time links these two types of creation. To return to the 1831 preface, in which she states: ‘Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded,’<sup>129</sup> Shelley’s words recall Victor piecing together his creature from pre-existing ‘materials’. However, Victor’s own process of using these ‘materials’ is flawed, as revealed by Shelley’s use of the term ‘keeping’.

‘Keeping’ can be defined as: ‘the maintenance of the proper relation between the representation of nearer and more distant objects in a picture’ or ‘the proper subserviency of tone and colour in every part of a picture, so that the general effect is harmonious to the eye.’<sup>130</sup> As an ambitious polar explorer, Walton, whose account frames those of Victor and the Creature, strives towards the horizon of a boundless landscape, putting his personal glory

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<sup>127</sup> Mary Shelley, Letter to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 5 December 1816, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>128</sup> [John Wilson Croker], ‘ART. V. Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus’, *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 18, Issue. 36, January 1818 (London: John Murray, 1818), pp. 379-85 (p. 382).

<sup>129</sup> Shelley, ‘Preface’ to *Frankenstein*, p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Keeping’, OED [online]: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/102785?rskey=jBn5Sw&result=1#eid> [accessed 21/04/16]

ahead of the safety of his crew. Writing home to his sister, he confesses that he needs to regulate his mind, and employing the terminology of an artist, Walton writes:

my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as painters call it) *keeping*; and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind.<sup>131</sup>

Victor, like Walton, lacks ‘keeping’ in his aspirations, and consequently creates a monster completely out of proportion with all those around him. Although Victor claims that the immense size of the Creature is a consequence of practicality, human hubris also makes him strive to improve on nature and, like an artist, he purposefully selects beautiful features for his Creature, but the hybrid nature and inhuman proportions immediately mark him out as a monster. According to Lord Kames in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), ‘every remarkable deviation from the standard makes accordingly an impression upon us of imperfection, irregularity, or disorder’, so that monstrous births, whilst ‘exciting the curiosity of a philosopher, fail not at the same time to excite a sort of horror.’<sup>132</sup> Victor’s reaction of horror, fleeing from his creation, fits this description. In contrast, Walton manages to maintain his perspective. James A. Wohlpart attributes this to the feminine influence provided from maintaining a line of communication to the outside world by writing home to his sister.<sup>133</sup>

To return to the work of Ann Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) illustrates the damage done to society when women like her heroine, Laura, are kept locked away:

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<sup>131</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 9.

<sup>132</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> American Ed. taken from the 8<sup>th</sup> London Ed., Vol. II of II (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1816), p. 363-64.

<sup>133</sup> James A. Wohlpart, ‘A Tradition of Male Poetics: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an Allegory of Art’, *Midwest Quarterly*, 39.3 (Spring 1998), 265-76.

The progress which she made in music and drawing, and in the lighter subjects of literature, while it pleased the Baroness, who was her sole instructress, brought with it bitter apprehension, that these accomplishments would probably be buried in the obscurity of a prison; still, however, they were not useless, since they served at present to cheat affliction of many a weary moment, and would in future delude the melancholy hours of solitude.<sup>134</sup>

For Laura, the primary aim of her artistic accomplishment is to attract male attention, and the civilizing effects of arts are lost when women are imprisoned; female influence is needed to unite warring clans and polish society. In *Frankenstein*, Walton is also surrounded by his crew, who constantly remind him of their desire to return home safely to their families. Community enables him to ‘regulate’ his mind, whereas Victor works on in seclusion; the self-imposed isolation contributing to his mental and physical decline as his unhallowed ambitions take over.

As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, community is of importance for artistic creation to have a beneficial, improving function, and in the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* Victor acknowledges Elizabeth’s earlier subduing influence: ‘I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness.’<sup>135</sup> However, once separated Victor states that: ‘Life and death appeared to me no more than ideal bounds which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world’,<sup>136</sup> and his all-consuming ambition causes him to neglect all else, including his family and friends.

In creating a being from the reanimated parts of dead bodies and then rejecting his progeny, Victor not only transgresses the natural order of life and death, but eschews ethics. Fleeing from the scene with horror and disgust, Victor fails to take moral responsibility for

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<sup>134</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (Oxford and New York: Oxford World’s Classics, 1995), p. 65.

<sup>135</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1831 text, p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 36.

his actions. For Shelley, aesthetics and morality are entwined. In her use of the term ‘keeping’, therefore, Shelley not only shows her understanding of the process of painting and how an image is constructed, but uses it to show the moral necessity of working within defined boundaries. As a consequence, *Frankenstein* can be seen as part novel, and part aesthetic treatise; a hybrid emerging from a chain of literary and artistic allusions, as evident in Shelley’s use of terminology such as ‘keeping’.

Shelley’s preoccupation with artistic creativity and the idea of the copy continues in *The Last Man* (1826), with her portrayal of two more artist heroines: Perdita, the Cumbrian shepherdess turned accomplished copyist, and the Greek princess, Evadne, who designs a flawed yet strikingly original National Gallery.

### **Repetition in *The Last Man***

Upon the publication Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), the novel was branded a mere repetition of what had come before it, with the first American review describing it as a ‘prose copy of Byron’s terrible painting of darkness.’<sup>137</sup> Published in 1826, Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* appeared the very year John Martin produced his first painting on the theme.<sup>138</sup> Fuelled by the political and environmental turmoil of the Napoleonic wars, and the ‘year without summer’ that followed the eruption of Mount Tambora, literary and artistic responses to the idea of the apocalypse had become particularly prevalent in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, leading Morton D. Paley to describe Shelley’s third novel, as being published ‘at just the wrong time’.<sup>139</sup> This is not only due to the proliferation of literary and

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<sup>137</sup> Anon, ‘Review: *The Last Man*’, *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, II (1833), p. 315, quoted in W.H. Lyle, *Mary Shelley: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1975), p. 175.

<sup>138</sup> This painting is now lost, but a later version from 1849 survives in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

<sup>139</sup> Morton D. Paley, ‘Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 4.1 (1989), 1-25 (p. 1).

artistic responses to the idea of the last man, but owing to the on-going controversy surrounding the originality of the theme. Thomas Campbell's poem 'The Last Man' (1823) had already invited comparison with Byron's 'Darkness' (1816); Francis Jeffrey's assertion in *The Edinburgh Review* that Campbell had 'borrowed' the idea from 'a very powerful sketch of Lord Byron's' prompting Campbell to write a letter to *The Times* in order to attest that Byron was in fact indebted to an earlier conversation with him. Given that Jean Baptiste de Grainville's apocalyptic novel *Le Dernier Homme* (1805) had been translated into English back in 1806, Campbell's desperation to be credited as an innovator rather than an imitator contributes to the idea of the last man being subject to ridicule. Thomas Hood's poem 'The Last Man' (1824) shows that it was already a theme ripe for satire, and by 1826 Paley states 'the subject of the Last Man had come to seem not apocalyptic but ridiculous', arguing that 'the imagination resists the idea of Lastness' when the novel itself 'presupposes a recipient or reader whose very existence negates the Lastness of the narrating subject'.<sup>140</sup> Paley's comments are supported by the contemporary responses to Shelley's work.

Despite the apparent vogue for last man narratives during the period, Shelley's contribution to the growing field was not well received. *The Monthly Review* noted that the same theme had 'already tempted the genius of more than one of our poets', before proceeding to describe the novel as the 'offspring of a diseased imagination.'<sup>141</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* labelled *The Last Man* an 'abortion',<sup>142</sup> *The Literary Magnet* referred to it as 'another Raw-head-and-bloody-bones',<sup>143</sup> whilst for *The Literary Gazette* it represented

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<sup>140</sup> Paley, 'Apocalypse without Millennium', p. 2.

<sup>141</sup> Anon, 'Art. XII. *The Last Man*', *The Monthly Review*, New Series, Vol. I: January-April 1826 (London: Printed for Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1826), pp. 333-35 (p. 334; p. 335).

<sup>142</sup> Anon, 'Hood's *Whims and Oddities*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. XXI: January-June 1827 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1827), pp. 45-60 (p. 54).

<sup>143</sup> Anon, 'Chit-Chat – Literary and Miscellaneous', *The Literary Magnet*, ed. by Tobias Merton (pseud.), New Series, Vol. I (London: Printed for Charles Knight, 1826), pp. 54-56 (p. 56).

‘A sickening repetition of horrors.’<sup>144</sup> The idea of repetition is central to each of these reviews, whether in terms of the novel’s relationship to other last man narratives or in reference to Shelley’s previous work. The vocabulary used is strikingly similar to reviews of *Frankenstein*. What *The Monthly Review* found particularly distasteful is the attention to detail, linking the minute description of the pestilence and plague to a lecture in anatomy: ‘It is not a picture which she gives us, but a lecture in anatomy, in which every part of the human frame is laid bare to the eye, in its most putrid state of corruption.’<sup>145</sup> However, they did also observe ‘genius’ in Shelley’s writing:

We must observe, however, the powers of composition displayed in this production, are by no means of an ordinary character. They are indeed uncontrolled by any of the good rules of writing; but they certainly bear the impress of genius, though perverted and spoiled by morbid affection.<sup>146</sup>

Shelley may have taken on a theme that had already gained considerable attention, but she is able to take the work of her predecessors and respond to it in her own way. Noting that her disregard for the rules creates work not of ‘an ordinary character’ reveals creativity. Despite the focus on repetition, Shelley is not thoughtlessly imitating others. Given her heroine’s propensity to paint copies, she actively uses the idea of repetition to comment upon her own creative process.

### **Mary Shelley’s Creative Process**

Writing in her journal in May 1824, Shelley exclaims her suitability for tackling the subject of lastness: ‘The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being’s feelings, feeling

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<sup>144</sup> Anon, ‘*The Last Man*. By the author of “*Frankenstein*”’, *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* (London: Printed for James Moyes, 1826), pp. 102-03 (p. 103).

<sup>145</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, pp. 333-35.

<sup>146</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, pp. 333-35.

myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me.’<sup>147</sup> The preserving effect of the copy highlights the importance of biography, as Lionel Verney, the titular last man, himself turns to writing in order to leave a record. However, Betty T. Bennett believes that it is reductive to consider the novel itself as a biographical work.<sup>148</sup> Constructing a thinly veiled biography would go against Shelley’s conception of the novel as an art form. In her review of Godwin’s *Cloudesley* (1830), Shelley articulates the superiority of her father’s writing, as compared to that of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, through artistic analogy:

The merely copying from our own hearts will no more form a first-rate work of art, than will the most exquisite representation of mountains, water, wood, and glorious clouds, form a good painting, if none of the rules of grouping and colouring are followed.<sup>149</sup>

As J.E. Young notes, ‘Shelley’s instructions advised a complex painting, making use of the adaption and allusion to real life, which nevertheless ought to do more than simplistically copy.’<sup>150</sup> Shelley’s letter to Byron’s last mistress, Teresa, Contessa Guiccioli, further exemplifies her process of characterization: ‘You will find in Lord Raymond and Count Adrian faint portraits but I hope not displeasing to you of B. [Byron] and S [Shelley] – but this is a secret.’<sup>151</sup> Young argues that ‘Shelley’s term ‘faint portrait’ implies less of an explicit representation of real-life figures within her work, but rather a conscious adaption of aspects of figures she knew, and which are subtly alluded to in her fiction.’<sup>152</sup> Young identifies this

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<sup>147</sup> Mary Shelley, Diary entry for 14 May, 1824, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Vol. 2: 1822-1844 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 476-77.

<sup>148</sup> Betty T. Bennett, ‘Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley’s “The Last Man”’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 26.3 (Summer, 1995), 147-52 (p. 147).

<sup>149</sup> [Mary Shelley], ‘*Cloudesley; a Tale*’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. XXVII: May 1830 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1830), 711-16 (p. 712).

<sup>150</sup> J.E. Young, ‘Perdita’s Cottage: Mary Robinson in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *The Last Man*, *Notes and Queries* (March 2017), 83-86 (p. 85).

<sup>151</sup> Mary Shelley, Letter to Teresa Guiccioli, 20 August 1827, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 562-66 (p. 566).

<sup>152</sup> Young, ‘Perdita’s Cottage’, p. 85.

process in the characterization of Perdita Verney, who is a composite of Mary Shelley, Mary ‘Perdita’ Robinson, and Claire Clairmont.<sup>153</sup>

Perdita, like Ellena Rosalba before her, is presented as a talented artist, particularly in terms of the copies she produces. She is the sister of the narrator, Lionel Verney, who describes her as a visionary who would actively seek out solitude by wandering the Cumberland hills in order to indulge her imagination: ‘she would ramble to the most unfrequented places, and scale dangerous heights, that in these unvisited spots she might wrap herself in loneliness’.<sup>154</sup> The sublime setting nurtures her imagination, as on the cusp of a precipice she can contemplate pain from a position of safety. At this stage, her reveries are not channelled into art, but into stories: ‘her active fancy wove a thousand combinations; she dreamt ‘of moving accidents by flood and field’ – she lost herself delightedly in these self-created wanderings and returned with unwilling spirit to the dull detail of common life’.<sup>155</sup> Perdita’s imagination gives her pleasure, even when dwelling on melancholy subjects as her mind is free to explore a myriad of possibilities when she herself has few opportunities. Lionel’s description of her waking dreams not only recalls those of Radcliffian heroines, but Shelley’s own tendency to create stories. As Angela Wright observes: ‘A figuration of Mary Shelley, Perdita is independent, capable of finding pleasure in her own companionship, and of indulging in dreams for the sake of pleasure alone.’<sup>156</sup> To return to Shelley’s 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, she remembers how the Scottish scenery she encountered as a child fostered

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<sup>153</sup> The actress and poet, Mary Robinson (1757-1800), became known by the nickname ‘Perdita’ after undertaking this role in an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* in 1779. Catching the attention of the Prince of Wales, she became his mistress with their correspondence written under the guise of Florizel and Perdita. Claire Clairmont (1798-1879), was the stepsister of Mary Shelley, and the mother of Lord Byron’s daughter, Allegra. Although not guilty of committing any sexual transgression, Perdita Verney is similarly bound to the Byronic figure of Lord Raymond.

<sup>154</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>155</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 16. The quotation ‘of moving accidents by flood and field’ is taken from ‘Othello’ (c. 1603), Act 1, Scene 3, when Othello recounts how he had told Desdemona and her father about his past. See William Shakespeare, *Othello: The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

<sup>156</sup> Angela Wright, *Mary Shelley* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), p. 99.

her imagination: ‘It was beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our house, or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains near, that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination, were born and fostered.’ Shelley describes her writing of this time as derivative, stating: ‘My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator—rather doing as others had done, than putting down the suggestions of my own mind.’ Wright notes that: ‘this authorial anxiety about originality, creativity and dreaming was pervasive throughout her career.’ Even though Shelley’s juvenilia is ‘strikingly original’, her imitative ‘early writing, she admits, was substantially different from her dreams, which were hers and hers alone.’<sup>157</sup> Shelley’s formative time in Scotland also influenced her description of Mathilda’s childhood in her novella of the same name. Although written *c.* 1819-20, *Mathilda* remained unpublished until 1959 owing to Godwin finding the theme of an incestuous father-daughter relationship ‘disgusting and detestable’.<sup>158</sup> Following the death of her mother, the title character is raised by her cold aunt in a house on the shore of Loch Lomond. Here, she ‘wandered for ever about these lovely solitudes’ whilst ‘occupied by pleasant day dreams’.<sup>159</sup> Without any human contact, she first relies on literature, then her own creations, to people her world:

I brought Rosalind and Miranda and the Lady of Comus to life to be my companions, or on my isle acted over their parts imagining myself to be in their situations. Then I wandered from the fancies of others and formed affections and intimacies with the aerial creations of my brain – but still clinging to reality I gave a name to these conceptions and nursed them in hope of realization.<sup>160</sup>

Although Shelley privileges her imagination over imitation, imitation is not necessarily a hurdle to overcome or something to be avoided. Woodville, the Shelleyan poet, is described

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<sup>157</sup> Angela Wright, *Mary Shelley*, p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> Maria Gisborne, *Maria Gisborne and Edward E. Williams, Shelley’s Friends: Their Journals and Letters*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 44.

<sup>159</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Mathilda*, ed. by Elizabeth Nitchie (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 10.

<sup>160</sup> Shelley, *Mathilda*, p. 11.

as having a mind capable of improving copies: ‘the shapes copied from nature that dwelt in his mind with beauty greater than their own.’<sup>161</sup> This particularly Romantic conception of imitation responds to Platonic mimesis by allowing for *imagination* to build upon observation of the natural world.

In *The Last Man*, Lionel focuses on Perdita’s singular mind and moods, but he does still rely on artistic allusion to describe her appearance. However, his examples do illustrate the primacy of her mind and suggest her inner life is visible in her countenance: ‘She was like one of Guido’s saints, with heaven in her heart and in her look, so that when you saw her you only thought of that within, and costume and even feature were secondary to the mind that beamed in her countenance.’<sup>162</sup> The unrefined Perdita may lack the personal qualities of a saint, but her contemplative gaze has the capacity to raise the mind of the beholder above earthly concerns, even though she is beautiful: ‘She was pale and fair, and her golden hair clustered on her temples, contrasting its rich hue with the living marble beneath.’<sup>163</sup> The reference to ‘living marble’ not only has associations with the myth of Pygmalion crafting an ideal feminine form and praying for her animation, but also recalls the statue of Hermione in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (c. 1609-11).<sup>164</sup>

Shelley’s Perdita shares her name with the lost daughter of Hermione and Leontes in Shakespeare’s play; a character who is abandoned and raised by shepherds after Leontes accuses his wife of adultery. As one of Shakespeare’s ‘Problem Plays’, *The Winter’s Tale* resists categorization. Tragedy is averted when the Oracle of Delphi proclaims Hermione’s innocence and Perdita is fortuitously reunited with her family. However, it is unclear whether the statue preserving Hermione’s memory is animated by supernatural means, or whether

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<sup>161</sup> Shelley, *Mathilda*, p. 62.

<sup>162</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 15.

<sup>163</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 15.

<sup>164</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale: The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

there is a rational explanation in that she has been disguised in this way. Shelley's own experimentation with genre means that whilst Shelley's Perdita is not a long lost princess, raised as a shepherdess, there are parallels in the pastoral setting and the theme of adultery. Rather than the novel being a direct copy or adaptation of a particular work, such as *The Winter's Tale*, there are echoes of source texts.

In *The Last Man*, it is Evadne who teaches Perdita to paint after Adrian, Duke of Windsor disrupts her isolated, pastoral existence. When Lionel is offered a role as the private secretary to the Ambassador at Vienna, Perdita is invited to return to Windsor with Adrian to live as the 'pupil, friend and younger sister' of Evadne.<sup>165</sup> Contact at court civilizes Perdita and she learns to play musical instruments and paint copies from the art collection. However, Perdita is pained by seeing Adrian's unrequited love for Evadne, so retreats to the solitude of a cottage in Windsor Forest: 'her pleasant alcove, redolent with sweetest flowers, adorned by magnificent casts, antique vases, and copies of the finest pictures of Raphael, Correggio, and Claude, painted by herself.'<sup>166</sup> According to Morton D. Paley, Perdita 'finds no constructive outlet for her powers (unless it be in copying Old Master paintings).'<sup>167</sup> However, these copies should not be overlooked as a passive female accomplishment.

The image of a woman artist surrounded by her copies recalls Sophie von la Roche's memories of Mary Delany (1700-1788), recorded in her diary during a visit to England in 1886. She describes Delany as a 'venerable lady close on ninety years, combining the rarest talents and a most unusual fate.'<sup>168</sup> Finding her sitting in a room surrounded by her artistic productions, von la Roche was drawn to survey the many pictures lining the walls: "There are

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<sup>165</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 36.

<sup>166</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 51.

<sup>167</sup> Paley, 'Apocalypse without Millennium', p. 11.

<sup>168</sup> Sophie von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786: being the diary of Sophie v. la Roche*, trans. by Clare Williams (London: J. Cape, 1933), p. 203.

no masterpieces you see there,' she said, 'merely copies I made while on my travels.'<sup>169</sup> Lisa Heer describes Mary Delany as 'an avid copier of paintings', with the practice forming much more than an primary stage of artistic development, but something she could return to again and again: 'Copying seems to have functioned for her as an opportunity for close repeated analysis and meditation on either the subject of the representation itself or of the skill and technique of the original artists.'<sup>170</sup> Copying remained an important pastime in terms of the valuable opportunity afforded to study the work of other artists as well as offering the chance to nostalgically dwell on past events, as when she wrote to a friend in 1745: 'I have copied in large one of the sketches of Dovedale that I took when we were there together. How many tender ideas did it raise whilst drawing it.'<sup>171</sup> Heer records that many such copies were left as gifts to Delany's female friends in her will, emphasizing the important role women play in the inheritance of art objects; sharing knowledge, experience, and memories.<sup>172</sup> Women were often responsible for the distribution of family collections, as exemplified by the portraits proving the parentage of the two sisters in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-5).<sup>173</sup>

Mary Shelley did draw from copies herself, as evidenced in a letter to Percy from October 1817, reminding him to bring her art supplies:

Remember my book--for transcribing

I want to practise drawing a little before I go to Italy--I have accordingly purchased pencils but find that it is too cold to draw from nature--could you get me a drawing or two to copy--I do not like prints Ask Marianne they may be either pencil drawings or water coloured.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> von la Roche, *Sophie in London*, p. 203.

<sup>170</sup> Heer, 'Copyists', p. 38.

<sup>171</sup> Mary Delany to Mrs Dewes, 23 November, 1745, in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, ed. by Augusta Hall Llanover, Vol. 2 of 3 (London: Richard Bentley, 1861), p. 400.

<sup>172</sup> Heer, 'Copyists', p. 39.

<sup>173</sup> Sophia Lee, *The Recess; Or, A Tale of Other Times* ed. by April Alliston (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

<sup>174</sup> Mary Shelley, Letter to Percy Shelley, 7 October 1817, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 53

Although copying is positioned second place to drawing directly from nature, there are practical advantages to the domestic setting. Furthermore, a domestic setting does not necessarily prevent or restrict work of national importance. Perdita has gained access to the prestigious art collection housed at Windsor castle to learn from the Old Masters as she hones her talent. Her copies of the finest paintings show her ability and her taste as a connoisseur, and copying provides Perdita with the opportunity to create a utopia, at least on the surface. By surrounding herself with idealized landscapes after Claude, Perdita curates her own pastoral idyll, nostalgically recreating her Cumberland home. When Lionel visits he views the space as a timeless haven from the outside world, proclaiming: 'I fancied myself in a fairy retreat untainted by and inaccessible to the noisy contentions of politicians and the frivolous pursuits of fashion.'<sup>175</sup> Not only is there nostalgia in Perdita reminding herself of her Cumberland home, but there is a sense of continuity, tradition, and eternal beauty in replicating fine art, rather than following fashions which will soon fade. The influence of art can last far longer than people. Where Lionel reads the copies as a means of blocking out the political turmoil of the outside world, Perdita does not: she sits 'in her flower-adorned alcove' reading a 'newspaper report of the debate in parliament, that apparently doomed her to hopelessness.'<sup>176</sup> Copying is a political act of selection and interpretation that can reveal someone's character: their anxieties, hopes, and beliefs. As attested by William Blake in his annotations to Reynolds: 'Every Eye Sees differently'.<sup>177</sup> An artist inevitably brings something of themselves to the work, even if it is a copy or an imitation.

In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), Walter Benjamin argues that technical developments in mechanical reproduction cause the aura of the original work of art to *wither*: the technique of reproduction 'removes the thing

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<sup>175</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 51.

<sup>176</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 67.

<sup>177</sup> Blake, 'Annotations', p. 645.

reproduced from the realm of tradition. In making many copies of the reproduction, it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences.’<sup>178</sup> Benjamin acknowledges that a work of art has always been reproducible, with copying practiced ‘by pupils as an artistic exercise, by masters in order to give works wider circulation, ultimately by anyone seeking to make money.’<sup>179</sup> That said, for Benjamin, ‘Even with the most perfect reproduction, *one thing* stands out: the here and now of the work of art - its unique existence in the place where it is at this moment.’<sup>180</sup> The physical condition of a work of art, its deterioration over time, and its history of ownership are all bound up in what make the original work of art special. The fact that people will still travel great distances and queue for the privilege of viewing a work of art shows that the authority of an original remains a draw in the age of mechanical reproduction. However, a reproduction can gain its own meaning depending on its own unique context. The positioning of images in this thesis informs their reading in relation to my argument. The same images in a museum, on a bedroom wall, or printed on a t-shirt will invariably gain other meanings. The scope for a different context to offer a different meaning opens up space for creativity which is not necessarily detrimental to the ‘aura’ of the original. In Anne Thackeray’s *Miss Angel*, the novel opens with the narrator viewing a print of Joshua Reynolds’s portrait of Angelica Kauffman. Despite only being a print, this image has the power to transport the viewer back, giving them privileged access to the sitter’s life story: ‘although the engraver has again come between us to reproduce the great master’s impression, [...] some feeling of her identity seems to reach one.’<sup>181</sup> The key difference for Benjamin is that through replication the social function of artistic practice has changed: ‘*Rather than being underpinned by ritual, it came to be underpinned by a different*

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<sup>178</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>179</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 3.

<sup>180</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 5.

<sup>181</sup> Thackeray, *Miss Angel*, p. 11.

*practice – politics.*<sup>182</sup> In *The Last Man*, art is connected to politics through the drive for national improvement.

### **Evadne, Art & National Improvement**

The improving influence of art is seen in Lionel's description of his idyllic existence in Windsor Forest with Raymond, Perdita, Idris, and Adrian: 'Sometimes we passed whole days under the leafy covert of the forest with our music and books.'<sup>183</sup> On Lionel's return from Vienna he immediately notices the positive changes brought about in his sister: 'I no longer recognised my reserved abstracted sister in the fascinating and open-hearted wife of Raymond.'<sup>184</sup> Perdita blossoms with love, and love fuels her creativity: 'tenderness and happiness improved her temper, and softened her natural reserve'.<sup>185</sup> However, their dream-like existence is shattered by Raymond's election as Protector.

With art posited as a means of social as well as personal improvement, Raymond is described as being 'continually surrounded by projectors and projects, which were to render England one scene of fertility and magnificence'<sup>186</sup> once he is elected Lord Protector. Such projects range from building canals and bridges to update the infrastructure of the country, to plans for a National Gallery:

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<sup>182</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 12.

<sup>183</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 90.

<sup>184</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 118.

<sup>185</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 91.

<sup>186</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 106.

Among other works of art in which he was engaged, he had projected the erection of a national gallery for statues and pictures. He possessed many himself, which he designed to present to the Republic; and, as the edifice was to be the great ornament of his Protectorship, he was very fastidious in his choice of the plan on which it would be built. Hundreds were brought to him and rejected. He even sent to Italy and Greece for drawings; but, as the design was to be characterised by originality as well as perfect beauty, his endeavours were for a time without avail.<sup>187</sup>

Raymond intends the gallery to be a testament to his good work; a lasting monument of his Protectorship. However, his demands for originality and perfect beauty to be united in the design prove difficult to meet. Looking to Greece and Rome to replicate the classical ideal of beauty would result in an imitation. A workable solution comes not from an established male architect, but from an anonymous female amateur:

At length a drawing came, with an address where communications might be sent, and no artist's name affixed. The design was new and elegant, but faulty; so faulty, that although drawn with the hand and eye of taste, it was evidently the work of one who was not an architect.<sup>188</sup>

Raymond is so drawn to the designs that he follows the Greek man sent as the artist's proxy, only to find Evadne living in squalor, dependent on art to support herself: 'She sat at the table; one small hand shaded her eyes from the candle; the other held a pencil; her looks were fixed on a drawing before her, which Raymond recognised as the design presented to him.'<sup>189</sup>

England is not yet a paradise for all, and difficult circumstances have led Evadne, an impoverished Greek princess, to enter the male realm of architecture anonymously. The ongoing war between Greece and Turkey has brought about the change in Evadne's fortune. Forced to flee her homeland, her husband's debts had mounted leading him to commit suicide. However, remaining proud and strong-willed, Evadne is able to support herself 'by

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<sup>187</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 107.

<sup>188</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 107.

<sup>189</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 109.

executing various designs and paintings' from the sale of which 'she earned a pittance'.<sup>190</sup> Whilst her designs for the gallery betray her lack of training, they do show her taste. The fact that Raymond perceives Eastern influences in her work illustrates the impossibility of achieving true originality when we are all subject to outside influences. However, as a woman without training, Evadne is in the ideal position to approach the problem. In the same way that *The Monthly Review* observed that Shelley's writing 'bear[s] the impress of genius' although it is 'uncontrolled by any of the good rules of writing',<sup>191</sup> Evadne is not restricted by a set of rules, and hence provides a creative solution unlike any other received.

Evadne's work is motivated by her love for Raymond, and the architectural plans function as a catalyst to their falling in love. Evadne's ultimate aim is to immortalize Raymond in stone,<sup>192</sup> not to gain recognition for her own talents. However, as seen in Chapter Two of this thesis, it is limiting for women's art to be seen as something fuelled by love, as the love story influences the interpretation and detracts from the skill displayed. Audrey A. Fisch thus reads Evadne's flawed art as an allegory for her relationship with Raymond, noting: 'Evadne is the flaw in the ideal union of Perdita and Raymond. Her flawed building, as well a metaphor for herself, reveals the flaw in Raymond's perfect public representation of himself and in the national unity that he embodies.'<sup>193</sup> Once Perdita discovers that Raymond has been secretly visiting Evadne, Raymond abandons his professional and personal roles of husband, father, and Protector to return to fight in Greece, whilst Perdita's grief puts an end to her painting:

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<sup>190</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 113.

<sup>191</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, pp. 333-35.

<sup>192</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 115.

<sup>193</sup> Audrey A. Fisch, 'Plaguing Politics: AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*', in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 267-86 (p. 274).

Perdita was still to a great degree uneducated. When first she left her peasant life, and resided with the elegant and cultivated Evadne, the only accomplishment she brought to any perfection was that of painting, for which she had a taste almost amounting to genius. This had occupied her in her lonely cottage, when she quitted her Greek friend's protection. Her pallet and easel were now thrown aside; did she try to paint, thronging recollections made her hand tremble, her eyes fill with tears. With this occupation she gave up almost every other; and her mind preyed upon itself almost to madness.<sup>194</sup>

Evadne and Perdita are read as polar opposites by Paley, but I would argue that their creativity is a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Perdita has been taught by Evadne, and her copies, therefore, show her learning from a mentor. This is significant given that Frances Borzello has remarked upon the absence of female mentorship in the narratives of *Art History*:

There are no accounts of discoveries of young female talent by established women painters, which is hardly surprising given that critics and historians have tended to see women artists as isolated freaks of nature rather than a link in a chain of women artists.<sup>195</sup>

Despite acknowledging the fact that 'Women artists always taught other women',<sup>196</sup> Borzello describes the late-eighteenth century as a landmark period in that it provides 'the earliest painted evidence of a female teacher-pupil relationship', citing Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, Mlle Marie Gabrielle Capet and lle Carreaux de Rosemond* (1785), as a case in point.<sup>197</sup> However, whilst 'a few leading women artists had female pupils and protégées, [...] normally a young female artist needed a male mentor to introduce her into the art world.'<sup>198</sup> Significantly, *The Italian* and *The Last Man* make this situation visible in terms of the mentorship between characters, and the process of literary imitation between authors.

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<sup>194</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>195</sup> Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 31-32.

<sup>196</sup> Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves*, p. 82.

<sup>197</sup> Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves*, p.82.

<sup>198</sup> Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves*, p. 32.

Reduced circumstances may have driven Evadne to develop her artistic talents beyond the copy, but she relies upon a male intermediary to deliver her designs to secure the sponsorship of Raymond. Both she and Perdita share the motivation of creating for Raymond, and either do not, or cannot, produce without him. Love has fuelled Perdita's genius, and without it she fades. Where Lionel is able to translate transcendental musical experience into words, the arts have only served to feed Perdita's melancholy. Although Lionel initiates an intervention through education, that sees Perdita begin to make inroads to self-discovery through the books she reads, she remains tethered to Raymond. Her exclamation, 'Would that I also had a career!'<sup>199</sup> in response to Raymond returning to fight in Greece, shows her limitations. Whereas Evadne dons a male disguise in order to fight for her country, Perdita can only follow Raymond. Deciding to commit suicide following his death, the act of tethering herself to the ship before throwing herself overboard literally and metaphorically binds her to Raymond, so that her body can be recovered for them to share the same grave. For Anne K. Mellor, Perdita's suicide 'embodies Mary Shelley's recognition that the gender-determined role of devoted wife within the bourgeois family is inherently suicidal: the wife submerges her identity into that of her husband, sacrificing her self to his welfare.'<sup>200</sup> She goes on to argue that 'The only alternative that Mary Shelley presents in *The Last Man* to this female experience of dependency and self-destruction within the family is a stoical solipsism rendered endurable only by an escapist imagination',<sup>201</sup> noting that 'When Lionel Verney is finally deprived of all human companionship, he turns – like Mary Shelley herself – to creative composition for comfort.'<sup>202</sup> Mellor interprets Lionel's literary efforts as futile, and by extension reads *The Last Man* as a silencing of the female voice: 'Finally, Mary Shelley implies, the female writer – like Lionel Verney – will not be read, her voice will not be heard,

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<sup>199</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>200</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p. 154.

<sup>201</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, p.157.

<sup>202</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, p.158.

her discourse will be silenced forever'.<sup>203</sup> However, Lionel turns to writing historical biography, then later his own story, to provide a link to other beings. It should not be forgotten that Shelley had been taught to copy out her father's letters with 'one eye to posterity',<sup>204</sup> and this desire to leave a record remained an influence upon her life and work. Lionel ultimately remains drawn to the arts, and his final act of writing down his story leaves a record that assumes a reader. What is more, this story is found and translated by a nameless, genderless editor.

The framing of Lionel's narrative as prophetic 'Sibylline Leaves' privileges the female voice as the voice of truth. When a group of travellers visiting Naples in 1818 enter the Sibyl's cave, one of them pieces together the fragments they find, becoming the nameless editor of the piece. In contrast to the silent editorship of Margaret Walton Saville in *Frankenstein*, *The Last Man* explicitly comments upon the active role of the 'decipherer' through an artistic analogy which argues the case for creativity within the copy:

I have often wondered at the subject of her verses, and at the English dress of the Latin poet. Sometimes I have thought, that, obscure and chaotic as they are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer. As if we should give to another artist, the painted fragments which form the mosaic copy of Raphael's Transfiguration in St Peter's; he would put them together in a form, whose mode would be fashioned by his own peculiar mind and talent.<sup>205</sup>

In his *Discourses on Art*, Joshua Reynolds employs a similar analogy between a writer producing a poetic translation and an artist painting a copy to argue that these forms require no thought from the practitioner:

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<sup>203</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, p. 159.

<sup>204</sup> Betty T. Bennett, 'Mary Shelley's Letters: The public/private self', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 214.

<sup>205</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 6.

To suppose that the complication of powers and variety of ideas necessary to that mind which aspires to the first honours of the Art of Painting, can be obtained by the frigid contemplation of a few single models, is no less absurd, than it would be in him who wishes to be a poet, to imagine that by translating a Tragedy he can acquire to himself sufficient knowledge of the appearances of Nature, the operations of the passions, and the incidents of life.<sup>206</sup>

Whilst the rigidity of working to a narrow set of examples would be limiting in terms of representing the variety of human experience, skill in poetic translation is not a simple case of substituting like for like. A translator must fit the form and metre as well as the meaning, making translation a highly skilled process of adaptation, requiring independent thought and comprehension, as opposed to being the mere exchange of words from one language for those corresponding in another. Shelley, therefore, opens up a world of possibilities by which an individual, such as the 'editor' of Lionel's narrative, can make their own unique work by reusing what has come before.

## Conclusions

In her diary entry for Sunday 27 November, 1814 Mary Shelley recorded that she had read Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* with enjoyment, describing a whole day spent reading and talking as 'a very happy day indeed.'<sup>207</sup> By the time Shelley returns to this text to make reference to it in *The Last Man*, Lionel's own reading experience is recalled with fondness. However, as Angela Wright has observed, 'The pleasure and carefree nature of that reading is inscribed here as something that is definitively in the past.'<sup>208</sup> As Lionel wanders through the deserted streets of Rome, a contrast is drawn between the thrilling terrors of Radcliffe's work and the horrors of his own desolate situation:

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<sup>206</sup> Reynolds, 'Discourse II', p. 23.

<sup>207</sup> Mary Shelley, Diary entry for Sunday 27 November 1814, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Vol. 1: 1814-1822 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 48.

<sup>208</sup> Wright, *Mary Shelley*, p. 104.

The romance with which, dipping our pencils in the rainbow hues of sky and transcendent nature, we to a degree gratuitously endow the Italians, replaced the solemn grandeur of antiquity. I remembered the dark monk, and floating figures of “The Italian” and how my boyish blood had thrilled at the description. I called to mind Corinna ascending the Capitol to be crowned, and, passing from the heroine to the author, reflected how the Enchantress Spirit of Rome held sovereign sway over the minds of the imaginative, until it rested on me – sole remaining spectator of its wonders.<sup>209</sup>

With references to the works of Ann Radcliffe and Madame de Staël sparked by the antique surroundings, Rome becomes a site of the real and fictional. Where the happy memories of reading such works as *The Italian* serve to distract Lionel from the miseries of his lonely situation, he is able to separate fiction from reality. The passage charts a distinct shift from character to author and then reader by imagining de Staël’s poet-heroine, Corinne, ascending to be crowned at the Capitol, before moving on to think about the celebrated author herself, until finally Lionel is able to consider himself as her sole-surviving inheritor. The final chapter of this thesis will address the wider influence of Madam de Staël’s novel in greater detail, but the reference made here shows the power of influence. Far from presenting a manifesto on the failure of the arts, Shelley demonstrates our inherent desire to communicate through the arts and through allusion to artistic precedent.

Like Radcliffe’s Ellena Rosalba, Perdita and Evadne are both likened to Grecian statues; judged to fulfil the classical ideal of perfect beauty in moments of still-life appraisal. However, characterized as being alluring when not needy, Shelley’s heroines are later rejected just as Victor rejects his Creature once it has been animated and gains subjectivity. In spite of this, *The Last Man* concludes by showing the superiority of human communion as Lionel wanders around Rome seeking solace through art. Lost in a reverie as he gazes upon ‘many a fair Madonna or beauteous nymph’, the space between art and life is no longer pleasurable:

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<sup>209</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 462.

They looked at me with unsympathizing complacency, and often in wild accents I reproached them for their supreme indifference – for they were human shapes, the human form divine was manifest in each fairest limb and lineament. The perfect moulding brought with it the idea of colour and motion; often; half in bitter mockery, half in self-delusion, I clasped their icy proportions, and, coming between Cupid and his Psyche's lips, pressed the unconceiving marble.<sup>210</sup>

Although sculpture may be unresponsive, Mary Shelley shows that the arts still have a role to play, with their power to endure stimulating emotion and disseminating knowledge as well as providing a lasting monument. Meanwhile, a copy serves to increase the scope for influence to spread and inspire new work. As seen in Chapter One, imitation can be a force for gradual change, in line with the Enlightenment drive for progress, but it is also possible to reconcile imitation with Romantic urge for creativity. When seen as a female form, with its own context, comparison with male hierarchy of art does women's art a disservice. The next chapter on 'sculpting' identity, will see a move away from considering a supposedly feminine mode of production, to address how women sculptors are represented in literature of the long eighteenth century, given that this is typically seen as a masculine, public art form.

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<sup>210</sup> Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 463.

## Chapter Four

### **Sculpting Identity: Anne Seymour Damer's Influence on the Aristocratic Artists of Hannah Cowley's *The Town Before You* (1795) and Anna Maria Porter's *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807)**

Long with soft touch shall Damer's chisel charm,  
 With grace delight us and with beauty warm;  
 Forster's fine form shall hearts unborn engage,  
 And Melbourne's smile enchant another age.

Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden* (1791)<sup>1</sup>

As one of the most famous woman sculptors of the eighteenth century, Anne Seymour Damer (1748-1828) has provided inspiration for numerous poets, playwrights, and novelists. This chapter, therefore, aims to reappraise two literary examples of aristocratic women sculptors: Lady Horatia Horton in Hannah Cowley's last play *The Town Before You* (1795) and Baroness Ingersdorf in Anna Maria Porter's novel *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807). Acknowledging Damer's influence upon the characterization of the women artist, and analysing Cowley and Porter's work in this light, will facilitate the exploration of how identity as a sculptor is tied to sex, sexuality, and class status. The salience of these issues is evident in Erasmus Darwin's poetic encomium of Anne Seymour Damer, quoted here as a pre-chapter epigraph. The sister poem to Darwin's 'Loves of the Plants' (1789), the 'Economy of Vegetation' (1791) lauds the technological innovations being made in science and industry. However, Darwin's focus on the female body, along with Damer's aristocratic female friendships, reminds the reader of the sculptor's advantageous connections, as well as the rumours surrounding her supposedly Sapphic sexual preferences. His praise of Damer's

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<sup>1</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden; A poem, in two parts. Part I. Containing The Economy of Vegetation. Part II. The Loves of the Plants. With philosophical notes* (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1791), pp. 69-70, Canto II, Lines 111-14.

‘soft touch’ not only minimizes the physical effort and skill required to sculpt from marble, but places the emphasis on status, beauty, and love, with the representation of Lady Elizabeth Foster’s ‘fine form’ and Lady Melbourne’s smile bestowed with the capacity to engage the hearts of observers for posterity.

The persistent rumours surrounding Damer’s love life, combined with her eccentric choice of art form and aristocratic status, have excited various literary responses. The pretentious and critical Lady MacLaughlan in Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) is recognized as a less than flattering portrait of Damer in later life from her preference for masculine attire, whilst the more recent publication of Emma Donoghue’s *Life Mask* (2004), an historical novel dramatizing the possible love triangle between Damer, Elizabeth Farren, and the Earl of Derby, shows the continued interest in Damer’s life and work.<sup>2</sup> Hannah Cowley’s play *The Town Before You* has been selected for analysis owing to the audience recognition of Damer at the height of her career in the character of Horatia Horton. Reading Anna Maria Porter’s *The Hungarian Brothers* alongside this text provides the opportunity to trace how a comic character can serve to legitimize, rather than simply ridicule, women’s artistic endeavour. Before turning to Damer’s fictional counterparts, the poetic response to Damer provides valuable insight into how she was perceived as a woman and as a sculptor.

‘On the Sculpture of the Honourable Mrs. A. Damer’ (1785), written by an anonymous contributor to the *Lady’s Magazine*, is a similar example to Darwin’s poem in that it has the Graces stepping in to ‘ease’ Damer’s labour:

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* (London: Virago, 1986); Emma Donoghue, *Life Mask* (London: Virago, 2004).

The Graces smiling wait on her command,  
 And ease the labour of their mistress' hand.  
 From her skill'd touch, immortal gods improve.  
 And senseless blocks are starting into love.<sup>3</sup>

Akin to a female Pygmalion, Damer's work is imbued with life and obtains the capacity to love and be loved with assistance from the gods. Damer's talent, therefore, is not only something passed down through her aristocratic ancestral line as a form of inherited legitimacy, but is endorsed by the gods. The fact that sculpting comes to her with *ease* counters the belief that it is an unfeminine pursuit by reducing the hard toil of manual labour. Other poems, however, focused not upon her art, but upon her personal life: William Combe's, *The First of April; Or, the Triumphs of Folly* (1777); *A Sapphick Epistle, from Jack Cavendish to the Honourable and most beautiful Mrs. D\_\_\_\_\_* (1778); and James Perry's *Mimosa: Or, The Sensitive Plant* (1779) each represented a scurrilous attack on her sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Emma Donoghue's research into such poetic accusations of Sapphism dates them from Damer's 1777 trip to Italy following her husband's suicide.<sup>5</sup> Damer's status as an aristocratic widow may have granted her the liberty to renew her early passion for sculpture, but she was open to critique and speculation. Although Donoghue goes on to separate the rumours surrounding Damer's sexuality from her work as a sculptor, Damer's identity as an artist cannot be fully understood without considering how her work intersects with other aspects of her life. It is difficult, and indeed undesirable, to separate Damer's identity as a sculptor from her gender, class, and sexuality. Her status as an aristocratic widow not only

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<sup>3</sup> Anon, 'On the Sculpture of the Honourable Mrs. A. Damer', *The Lady's Magazine; or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, XVI (London: Printed for G. Robinson, 1785), p. 494. Quoted by Sterckx in *Women and Material Culture*, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> William Combe, *The First of April: Or, the Triumphs of Folly: A Poem* (London: Printed for J. Bew, 1777); Anon [Jack Cavendish], *A Sapphick Epistle, from Jack Cavendish to the Honourable and most beautiful Mrs. D\_\_\_\_\_* (London: Printed for M. Smith, 1778); James Perry, *Mimosa: Or, The Sensitive Plant; A Poem* (London: Printed for W. Sandwich, 1779).

<sup>5</sup> Emma Donoghue, "Random Shafts of Malice?": The Outings of Anne Damer', in *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 127-46 (p. 131).

gave her the connections to pursue her chosen career, but provided the means for her to avoid remarriage and live outside of heteronormative ideals.

Damer was not only an artist, but an accomplished amateur actress and writer. The primary view of Damer as a sculptor means that her novel *Belmour* (1801) has not received due critical attention. Following a contextual discussion of women sculptors and biographical portrayals of Anne Seymour Damer, the artist protagonist of Damer's novel *Belmour* will be analysed as a Radcliffian heroine. Although not a Gothic novel in terms of supernatural terror, Damer draws on the concern with lineage and inheritance to comment upon the precarious position of women in society, dependent on men. I will then turn to explore Damer's influence upon the characterization of the two aristocratic women sculptors in *The Town Before You* and *The Hungarian Brothers* in order to challenge the reading of these artists as comic characters and reposition them as a means of recovering reputation. A queer reading of these texts will bring their critique of patrilineal inheritance to the forefront of discussion, to illustrate how the aristocratic artist has independence, and leaves a different legacy with their work as their 'offspring'.

It has long been debated whether romantic friendships, like those Damer enjoyed with the likes of Elizabeth Farren and Mary Berry, can be interpreted as lesbian relationships. For constructivist scholars of sexuality, the answer would be a resounding 'no'. According to Sally O'Driscoll: 'evidence of what would now be termed lesbian sexual acts did not produce the equivalent of a twentieth-century lesbian identity.'<sup>6</sup> However, Terry Castle disagrees that it is an anachronism to speak of lesbian identity pre-1900, challenging the notion that 'Sigmund Freud, and others "invented" the notion of female sexual deviance around 1900' and that before such categorization 'there was no such thing as lesbian identity, nor any self-

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<sup>6</sup> Sally O'Driscoll, 'Outlaw Readings: Beyond Queer Theory', *Signs*, 22.1 (1996), 30-51 (p.43).

avowedly “homosexual” behaviour on the part of individual women’.<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to know whether there was actually a sexual element to Damer’s connections, but Damer can be termed queer in that she led an unconventional life for the time. Susan McCabe describes how ‘queer theory has to some extent further opened the possibility of rereading periods prior to the modern sexual taxonomies as a means of undoing the straitjacketing of the homo/heterosexual binary’.<sup>8</sup> Negotiating the difficult path between tracing an unbroken genealogy of lesbian history and accepting that different people have at different times had alternate experiences, Susan McCabe’s positioning of Queer Historicism, as combining ‘the work of excavation with the recognition that sexualities are socially constructed and can take multiple forms’<sup>9</sup> goes some way towards reconciling the nature versus nurture debate waged by essentialists and constructivists.<sup>10</sup>

It is beyond the scope of the chapter to enter the essentialist versus constructivist debate surrounding sexual identity, but the wide scope offered by ‘queer’ to encompass non-normative, non-binary identities is particularly useful when discussing Damer, given that an eighteenth-century understanding of sex as penetration by the penis complicates the categorization of lesbian acts. For this reason, Andrew Elfenbein suggests that Damer was able to defend herself against the charge of committing something ‘morally depraved’, without condemning the type of loving, affectionate relationships she enjoyed.<sup>11</sup> Kathryn R. Kent’s method of close reading the ‘efforts to overturn the centrality of the heterosexual

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<sup>7</sup> Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Susan McCabe, ‘To Be and to Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11.1 (2005), 119-34 (p. 120).

<sup>9</sup> McCabe, ‘The Rise of Queer Historicism’, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Whilst it is beyond the remit of this chapter to rehearse the essentialist/constructivist debate, full discussions can be found in Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (London: Routledge, 1989) and Caroline Gonda and Chis Mounsey (eds.), *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, ‘Anne Damer’s Sapphic Potential’, *Romantic Genius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 91-124 (p. 95).

family'<sup>12</sup> will be key to understanding Damer's influence upon literary depictions of women sculptors. Taking Berlant and Warner's definition of 'heteronormative' as 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged',<sup>13</sup> Damer's preference to focus on sculpture rather than remarry poses a direct challenge to heteronormative expectations. However, it is her class privilege which enables her to support this lifestyle. If the term lesbian is anachronistic for the time, Sapphic offers an apt alternative in that its derivation from the poet Sappho means that it combines the sense of same-sex love with the idea of a highly-skilled literary woman. As Margaret Reynolds has noted, Sappho was a name for 'The Learned Lady' during the Middle Ages, sinking to be considered as a depraved 'Daughter of de Sade' in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> During the eighteenth century, references to Sappho can combine the idea of a talented woman artist with lesbian desire.

## Women & Sculpture

As discussed in Chapter Two, Pliny's account of the origins of painting credits the Corinthian Maid with tracing her lover's outline from the shadow he casts on a wall in order to preserve his likeness. However, it is her father, the potter Butades, who goes on to mould a clay bust from her work, transforming the two dimensional trace into a three dimensional form. Although Pliny concedes that it 'was through his daughter that he made the discovery',<sup>15</sup> the story cements a long-standing association of sculpture as a male domain. Whilst wax modelling was seen as a simpler, less physically demanding pursuit, the physical strength and

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<sup>12</sup> Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24.2 (January 1998), 547-66 (note to p. 548).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion* (London: Random House, 2010) p. 2. I will return to the figure of Sappho in the conclusion to this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> See Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 35, pp.371-73.

exertion required to hue marble, combined with the impracticality of female dress, the danger of mounting a scaffold to complete monumental public works, and the dust and dirt created, all contribute to sculpture being considered the least feminine of the arts.

According to James Dallaway's *Anecdotes of the Arts in England* (1800): 'no female sculptor had attained excellence sufficient to be recorded.' He states that: 'The mallet and chisel are not usually seen in the hands of the Graces.' However, Dallaway does note that 'we have one very extraordinary instance' in Properzia De' Rossi (c. 1490-1530).<sup>16</sup> De' Rossi is often cited as an exceptional example of a woman sculptor, and is the only woman granted her own *Vita* in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550).<sup>17</sup> However, Vasari's comments on the debilitating effects of melancholia caused by unrequited love, repeated by Dallaway, limit the potential achievements of her sex. When Horace Walpole came to write a panegyric of Anne Seymour Damer in the prefatory advertisement to his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1780), he hailed her as the inheritor of classical taste and skill, failing to remember any other women sculptors of renown:

Mrs. Damer, daughter of General Conway, has chosen a walk more difficult and far more uncommon than painting. The annals of statuary record few artists of the fair sex, and not one that I recollect of any celebrity. Mrs. Damer's busts from the life are not inferior to the antique; and theirs, we are sure, were not more like.<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, the negative sentence construction 'not inferior' presents a rather guarded compliment, yet it implicitly serves to answer critics who saw Damer's work as lacking. However, by placing Damer on a pedestal as a unique example of a woman sculptor he neglects to mention the likes of Luisa Roldán (1656-1704), Patience Lovell Wright (1725-

<sup>16</sup> James Dallaway, *Anecdotes of the Arts in England* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800), p. 409.

<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). A *Vita* for Properzia De' Rossi appears in the first edition of 1550, and is extended in the 1568 edition when Vasari adds material on the painters Plautilla Nelli, Lucrezia della Mirandola, and Sofonisba Anguissola.

<sup>18</sup> Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4 of 4 (London: J. Dodsley, 1782), p. xii.

1786), and Marie-Anne Collot (1748-1821). Furthermore, Charlotte Boyle (1769-1831) and Lady Diana Beauclerk (1734-1808) were notable British contemporaries of Damer whom Walpole does not recognize, with Boyle described by him as ‘an imitatress of Mrs. Damer’ in a letter to the Earl of Strafford.<sup>19</sup> Boyle’s bust of her brother is aligned as a mere domestic pastime compared to the professional, public works of Damer, given that ‘Mrs. Damer herself is modelling two masks for the key-stones of the new bridge at Henley’.<sup>20</sup> Singling out his goddaughter as the one shining example of her sex only serves to highlight Damer’s eccentricity whilst whitewashing the contributions of her predecessors, contemporaries, and followers.

Marjan Sterckx’s research identifies 230 sculptures produced by women for public spaces in London, Paris, and Brussels between 1789 and 1914. However, this figure does only represent 0-3% of the number of sculptures produced by men in this period.<sup>21</sup> Although women sculptors probably did not represent more than 1% of the profession during the long eighteenth century, Sterckx’s work on artists’ dictionaries shows an increase in women taking up sculpture with ‘a total of around 40 sculptresses active between 1660 and 1750, and about twice that number between 1750 and 1830’.<sup>22</sup> Sculpture was becoming a fashionable pursuit for women at the end of the eighteenth century and although Damer was not the only practitioner, she helped to promote it by teaching her art to the likes of Sarah Siddons and possibly also Caroline of Brunswick, a bust of whom she produced. The 1804 portrait of Princess Caroline by Thomas Lawrence depicts her in front of a bust, clasping a modelling

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<sup>19</sup> Horace Walpole, Letter to the Earl of Strafford, 7 September 1784, in *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. by P. Cunningham, Vol. VIII of IX (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), p. 502.

<sup>20</sup> Walpole, *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, p. 502.

<sup>21</sup> Marjan Sterckx, ‘The Invisible ‘Sculpteuse’: Sculptures by Women in the Nineteenth-Century Urban Public Space – London, Paris, Brussels,’ *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, 7.2 (Autumn 2008), 98-138 (p. 99).

<sup>22</sup> Marjan Sterckx, ‘Pride and Prejudice: Eighteenth-century Women Sculptors and their Material Practices’, in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 86-102 (p. 86).

tool, illustrating the suitability of such a pastime for aristocratic women. According to Alison Yarrington: 'It is an image of refinement and elegance, untouched by any indication of labour which the completion of that process, transferring the clay model to marble or casting the work to bronze, would require.'<sup>23</sup> However, painted after her separation from the Prince of Wales, the somewhat defiant, front-facing pose shows a woman determined to reclaim her image and make her own way in the world.



**Figure 4.1:** Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Caroline Amelia Elizabeth of Brunswick* (1804), National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 244, image © National Portrait Gallery.

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<sup>23</sup> Alison Yarrington, *The Female Pygmalion: Anne Seymour Damer, Allan Cunningham, and the Writing of a Woman Sculptor's Life* (London: Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, 1997), p. 40.

In her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, Priscilla Wakefield recommends sculpture, alongside poetry, music, and painting, as a ‘refined entertainment’<sup>24</sup> which ladies can pursue to avoid idleness and dissipation. Despite confessing to know little of the art herself, she cites Anne Seymour Damer as an example to prove its suitability:

Statuary and modelling are arts with which I am too little acquainted to hazard any opinion concerning, but the productions of the honourable Mrs. Damer, and a few others, authorize an assurance, that women have only to apply their talents to them in order to excel. If the resistance of marble and hard substances be too powerful for them to subdue, wax and other materials of a softer nature, will easily yield to their impressions.<sup>25</sup>

However, Wakefield divides her recommendations into distinct classes of women, and Damer’s aristocratic background helped her to pursue her chosen art form. Biographical accounts of Damer’s life further reveal the importance of her lineage.

### **Art & Ancestry in Biographical Accounts of Anne Seymour Damer**

Born in 1748, Anne Seymour Conway was the daughter of the celebrated military hero, Field Marshal Henry Seymour Conway (1721-1795), and Lady Caroline Campbell (1721-1803), the only daughter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Argyll and the widow of the Earl of Ailesbury. Anne’s parentage placed her at the very centre of an illustrious circle of friends and relatives, which included Horace Walpole. As her father’s cousin and a close family friend, Walpole became Anne’s godfather and guardian. When, in 1751, her father travelled to Ireland in his role of Assistant Secretary, it was Walpole who was entrusted with the care of the young Anne, who stayed behind with him at Strawberry Hill. Walpole became her life-long friend and supporter, encouraging all her artistic aspirations from an early age.

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<sup>24</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, pp. 133-34.

Anne had started sculpting at the age of ten, moulding small wax figures representing the knights in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, but in *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1829-33), Allan Cunningham attributes Damer's interest in pursuing the plastic arts to a conversation she had with David Hume when she was 'some eighteen or twenty years old' after they had been 'accosted by a wandering Italian boy, who offered for sale some plaster figures and vases which he carried.'<sup>26</sup> According to Cunningham's anecdote, Hume talked to the boy and gave him a shilling before continuing on his way, but this encounter prompted Damer to tease her companion for paying any attention:

Sometime afterwards the young lady related in company the adventure of Mr. Hume and this wandering artist, not without a satiric touch at his squandering his time on paltry plaster images. "Be less severe, Miss Conway," said Hume; "those images at which you smile were not made without the aid of both science and genius – with all your attainments, now, you cannot produce such works."<sup>27</sup>

The precocious Anne supposedly took this as a challenge, shut herself away from society and duly set about producing a wax bust of Hume having been 'dared' by him. His response is reported to have been that her work "is clever and much better than first attempts usually are", with the addendum, "but believe me it is much easier to model in wax than to carve in marble" prompting a second attempt.<sup>28</sup> Neither bust of Hume survives to verify the anecdote, but versions of this story have continued to be retold to explain why a woman was compelled to pursue the work of a sculptor.

In *The Queens of Society* (1860), a compilation of biographical sketches of literary ladies including the likes of Elizabeth Montagu and Madame de Staël, the Hume anecdote is used to present Anne Seymour Damer's feminine qualities. Balancing out her masculine

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<sup>26</sup> Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 249.

<sup>27</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 250.

strength and courage with a long digression on Damer's beauty, this text makes the suggestion that she could cover her hair and protect her dress whilst working as a means to argue that a woman sculptor's reputation could remain untarnished.<sup>29</sup> Whilst Cunningham concedes that 'Mrs. Damer was slim and elegant',<sup>30</sup> there is more focus on her work in his biographical account, but he admires Damer for her attitude: her ambition, tenacity, and dedication, more than her actual skill as a sculptor. Her stubborn dedication to persevere with her work, even in the face of danger, is attested to by the fact that she diligently continued working after falling from a scaffold. In a letter to Mary Berry dated 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1791 she describes the incident, stating: 'I continued my work, and did not mention my fall.' Although shaken, she got up and said nothing until the point when the mounting pain made her feel so faint: 'as to be obliged to go upstairs, which I could accomplish and get a good glass of hartshorn and water.'<sup>31</sup> Whilst the writer for *The Annual Biography and Obituary* (1829) proposes that accident 'in a great measure, determines the various pursuits of ingenious minds',<sup>32</sup> *The Queens of Society* entry emphasizes the strength of Damer's 'Norman blood':

She had the emulation of a man, the beauty of a woman, the courage of a warrior, and the blood of the Normans. This last circumstance, an accident which is the least part of her praise, perhaps recommends her most to our lady readers, to whom "blood" is the worth of blood, and who see in race a palliative of many vices and a high enhancement of a few virtues.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst Damer's blood is in itself an accident of birth, the writers of this American text accept, with a degree of irony, that ancestry confers legitimacy. Noting that ever since the Conquest,

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<sup>29</sup> Grace & Philip Wharton, 'Anne Seymour Damer', *The Queens of Society* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860), pp. 384-401 (pp. 385-86).

<sup>30</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 270.

<sup>31</sup> Anne Seymour Damer, Letter to Mary Berry, 20 June 1791, in *The Berry Papers, 1763-1852*, ed. by Lewis Melville (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1913), p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> Anon, 'The Honourable Anne Seymour Damer', No. IX in *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, Vol. 13 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), pp. 125-36 (p. 126).

<sup>33</sup> Wharton, *The Queens of Society*, p. 384.

a Norman ‘may do with honor’ what a Saxon ‘can only do with ignominy’,<sup>34</sup> there is some regret in the power blood bestows, effectively allowing the fashionable whims of the ruling elite to be accepted and praised. Although Damer’s blood gives her license, she has other valuable qualities, including a love of liberty and progress, which reinforce her standing as a Whig who did not wish to rely upon her family connections. Damer is, therefore, someone who paradoxically stands for tradition and the drive for social change, with both positions having positive and negative aspects in terms of her career as a sculptor. For example, whilst aristocratic privilege enabled her to pursue a prestigious, masculine art form, it also meant that she was always to be judged as a lady amateur.

Unimpressed with Walpole’s unreserved praise for Damer’s talent, Cunningham emphasized that a ‘colder account must be recorded of her genius and her works by one who has never been cheered by her wit nor charmed by her beauty’.<sup>35</sup> The result is a rather harsh estimation which struggles to reconcile Damer the aristocratic woman and Damer the sculptor:

Her sex and situation render it difficult to estimate her real merits as an artist. If we look at some half dozen of her busts, and at most of her models, as the works of a female of rank and fashion, it is impossible to refuse high praise; but if we regard the whole of her works, and consider them only as they are intrinsically excellent, we shall be compelled to notice a woful [sic] difference of execution in models as well as the marbles.<sup>36</sup>

Although Cunningham grudgingly concedes that ‘it is impossible to refuse high praise’, he views her successes in the light of his categorization of her as a lady amateur, rather than as a professional artist, and tackles Walpole’s assessment of Damer’s work as comparable to that of the greats of classical statuary with the retort: ‘She lived and died in the vain belief that she

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<sup>34</sup> Wharton, *The Queens of Society*, p. 384.

<sup>35</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 248.

<sup>36</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 271.

was an artist in the spirit of the illustrious sculptors of Greece'.<sup>37</sup> A terracotta eagle by Damer presented to Horace Walpole and displayed with pride at Strawberry Hill, was particularly characterized as the 'offspring' of his antique specimens. As Walpole wrote to the Countess of Ossory on 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1787: 'Mrs Damer has given me her Eagle, which I call *the spoilt child* of my antique one, it is in such a passion. I hope your Ladyship will approve of the motto I design for it.'<sup>38</sup> Claiming Damer was the inheritor of classical taste and skill, that motto read: *Non me Praxiteles fecit, at Anna Damer.*<sup>39</sup> This playful joke, highlighting the piece of sculpture as the work of Damer, not Praxiteles, brings to mind the similarities as well as the differences between them. Damer did at least inherit her mother's artistic talent, Lady Ailesbury being famed for her worsted work. Her daughter's skills were honed with lessons in drawing from John Bacon, anatomy from William Cruikshank, and modelling from Guiseppe Ceracchi, who sculpted Damer as the Muse of sculpture (1779); a piece now held at the British Museum.

Damer exhibited thirty-two works at the Royal Academy between 1784 and 1818. Whilst perhaps most celebrated for her animal sculptures, she also completed likenesses of illustrious Britons such as George III, Charles James Fox, Lord Nelson, the Duchess of Devonshire, Sarah Siddons, and Elizabeth Farren. Despite producing private commissions more often than public works, her keystones depicting Tamesis and Isis can still be seen on Henley Bridge. She progressed from working in wax to produce statues in terracotta, bronze, and marble, but faced accusations concerning the level of help she required from assistants. Cunningham acknowledges the studio practice of using assistants, but his description of Damer's use of 'subordinate hands' questions her level of involvement to the extent that he suggests that she is not 'entitled to be named in comparison with the productions of first-rate

<sup>37</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 273.

<sup>38</sup> Horace Walpole, Letter to the Countess of Ossory, 14 June 1787, in *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. Peter Cunningham, Vol. IX of IX (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), p. 97.

<sup>39</sup> Translation: I was made by Anne Damer not Praxiteles.

artists’,<sup>40</sup> and includes Joseph Smith’s accusation that she could not claim the work as her own given that he would carve for her.<sup>41</sup> According to Sterckx, the studio practice which relied on assistants to do the strenuous work, realizing the master’s designs, merely valorises the mind over the body. However, ‘in the case of male sculptors assistance was viewed as a mark of success and prestige, with women, it was seen as a sign of their weakness and unsuitability for this artistic practice.’<sup>42</sup> This double standard is evident in the rumours that dogged Damer and which persisted long after her death, with Leslie Stephen’s entry for Damer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* alluding to the ‘ghosts’ who silently helped her with the most strenuous carving work without recognition: ‘The merits of her works were chiefly perceptible when proper allowance was made for her position as an amateur fine lady. It was whispered that she received a good deal of assistance from ‘ghosts’— in the slang of sculptors.’<sup>43</sup> Once again, Damer’s talent is positioned in relation to her status as a lady amateur.

### **Sculpture & Sapphism**

The accusation that she received too much assistance to claim her work as her own was not the first scandal to threaten Damer’s reputation. In 1767, 18-year-old Anne Conway had married the Hon. John Damer in what was to prove an unhappy union. John Damer was a profligate spendthrift who mounted considerable debts, and their childless marriage came to a violent end in 1776 when John shot himself in a room above a pub following a night of heavy drinking and gambling in Covent Garden. The events of that night became widely known, the suicide even providing inspiration for an episode in the Duchess of Devonshire’s *roman à*

<sup>40</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 255.

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, p. 272.

<sup>42</sup> Marjan Sterckx, ‘Pride and Prejudice: Eighteenth-century Women Sculptors and their Material Practices’, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Leslie Stephen, ‘Damer, Anne Seymour’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885-1900), Vol. 13, pp. 450-51 (p. 451).

*clef*, *The Sylph* (1778), whereby the heroine's dissolute husband kills himself in strikingly similar circumstances, freeing her way to find happiness with the mysterious *Sylph* who has been writing to her as an anonymous moral guide.<sup>44</sup> The lack of issue paired with Damer's supposed lack of grief following her husband's death led to rumours that she had a preference for members of her own sex.

John Damer's death left his widow with negative publicity and considerable debts, but also a renewed sense of freedom to pursue her interest in the arts. Emma Donoghue notes that, 'Though serious engagement in this strenuous, dirty branch of art was extremely unusual for a lady, it did not in itself attract to her any bad publicity at first'.<sup>45</sup> When rumours of lesbianism resurface in the 1780s, Andrew Elfenbein proposes that it is a direct consequence of Damer's success as a sculptor, and Marjan Sterckx agrees.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Donoghue separates critiques of Damer's sculptural practices from accusations of Sapphism by attributing rumours of her preference for her own sex to her close friendship with Elizabeth Farren at this time; a sentimental 'romantic friendship' if not a lesbian relationship, which had the potential to be viewed in particularly negative terms due to the reports from Revolutionary France detailing Marie Antoinette's sexual exploits with her inner circle of female friends.<sup>47</sup> Where the backlash against the French Queen associates same-sex love with the 'depraved' acts of the upper classes, the satirical print *The Damerian Apollo* (1789) brings together Sapphism and sculpture.

In 1789, reports that Damer had been commissioned to produce a monumental work of public sculpture prompted William Holland to publish a satirical response to the claims.

<sup>44</sup> Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, *The Sylph* (York: Henry Parker, 2001). The Duchess of Devonshire and Anne Seymour Damer were friends, who had been painted together, along with Lady Melbourne, in Daniel Gardner's friendship portrait, *The Three Witches from Macbeth* (1775).

<sup>45</sup> Donoghue, 'Random Shafts of Malice?', p. 128

<sup>46</sup> See Andrew Elfenbein, 'Anne Damer's Sapphic Potential', *Romantic Genius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 91-124 (p. 95), and Marjan Sterckx, 'Pride and Prejudice: Eighteenth-century Women Sculptors and their Material Practices', p. 91.

<sup>47</sup> Donoghue, 'Random Shafts of Malice?', p. 135.

The print known as *The Damerian Apollo* depicts Damer at work in her studio completing the nude figure of Apollo, which, rumour had it, was set to grace the roof of Henry Holland's new Drury Lane Theatre.

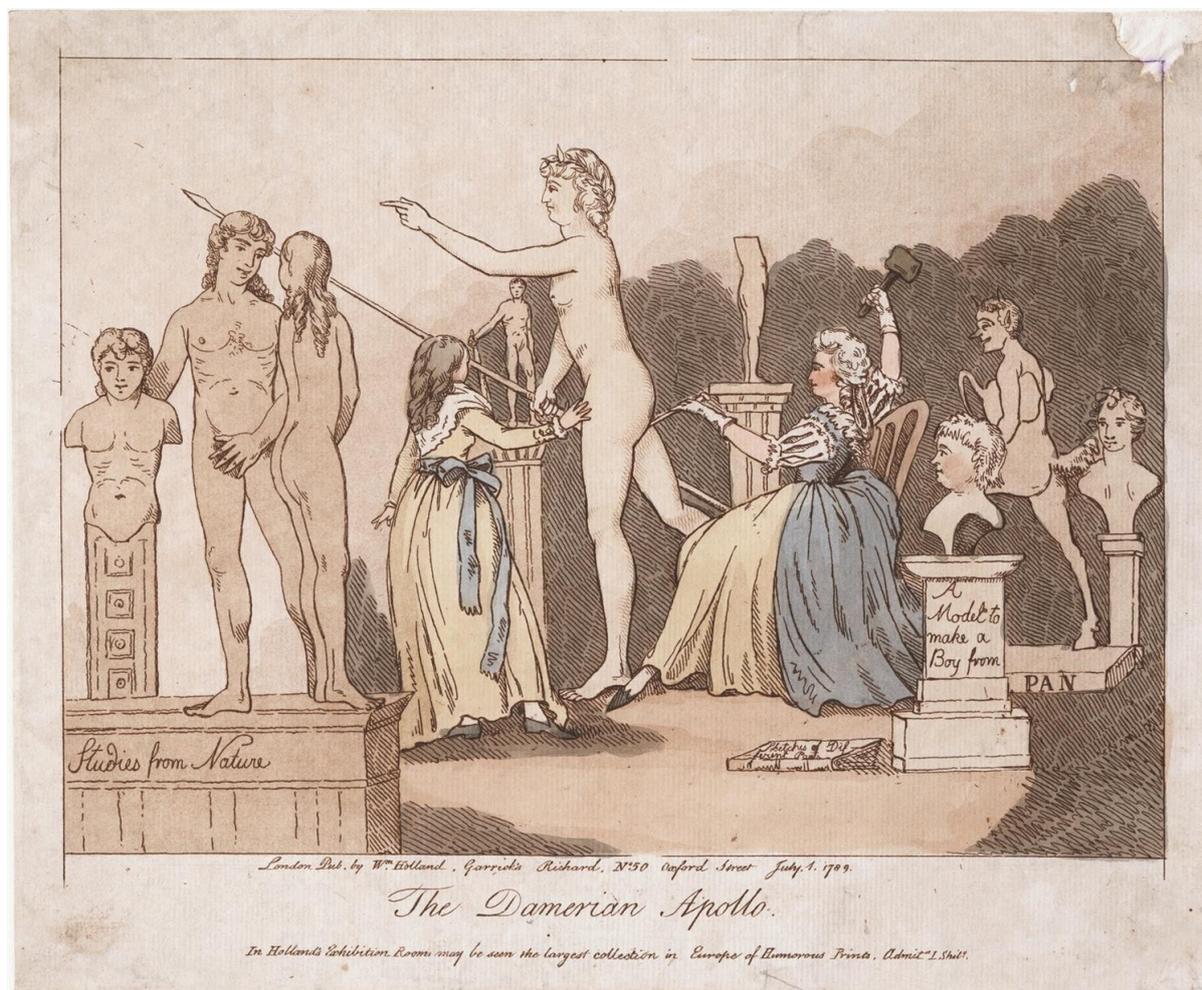


Figure 4.2: Anon, *The Damerian Apollo* (1 July 1789), Published by Wm Holland, Garrick's Richard, No. 50 Oxford Street, London, Lewis Walpole Library, Record No. Iwlp06691, image courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.<sup>48</sup>

The impractical, fashionable dress Damer wears highlights her unsuitability for the task in hand, when in reality she was widely known to have adopted more masculine-style clothes and would don a durable sculptor's apron when working. Wielding a chisel, ready to strike an emasculating blow from behind as her startled female companion looks on, the print

<sup>48</sup> The copy held by the Lewis Walpole Library was removed from Horace Walpole's extra-illustrated copy of his *Reminiscences*, showing the family awareness of the print.

emphasizes Damer's immodest presumption in taking on the masculine role of sculptor, whilst unsubtly hinting at her sexual preference for women. Unable to use a life model, a manual on anatomy tellingly lies discarded on the floor, with a lack of first-hand knowledge working to further the rumours surrounding Damer's sexuality which had circulated ever since her husband's suicide.

The unsuitability of Damer for the task of sculpting the male body was noted in Mary Robinson's poem *Modern Manners* (1793), in which she comments upon what she perceives as an inappropriate reversal of gender roles by comparing the renowned naturalist Joseph Banks's interest in the minutiae of insects with Damer's work sculpting neoclassical subjects: 'When BANKS delights in BUTTERFLIES and FLEAS, | And DAMER forms the PARIAN HERCULES!'<sup>49</sup> In fact, Damer never sculpted Hercules, but the example is selected as an attack on a supposed preoccupation with the naked body. The figure of Apollo was particularly associated with female arousal, as recounted by 'La Provençale devant l'Apollon du Belvédère au Musée Napoléon', purportedly translated from a German journal and reprinted in the *Journal des Dames et des Modes* (1807):

Arriving before the Apollo, she quivered and stopped as if struck by thunder. Little by little a brilliant fire sparkled in her eyes, which before had been clear and steady; all her being was animated as if by electricity; one could see that she was experiencing a singular metamorphosis.<sup>50</sup>

Overwhelmed by the depiction of divine beauty, the viewing experience pre-empts 'Stendhal Syndrome' in its similarity to Stendhal's physiological reaction to seeing the great artworks of Florence in 1817, recounted in his book *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to*

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Robinson, *Modern Manners, a Poem* (London: Printed for the author, and sold by James Evans, 1793), Canto I, Lines 335-36.

<sup>50</sup> Anon. [signed: Madame . . . , témoin oculaire], 'La Provençale devant l'Apollon du Belvédère, au Musée Napoléon,' *Journal des Dames et des Modes*, 26, May 10, 1807, pp. 207-08: 'Parvenue devant l'Apollon, elle frémit et s'arrêta comme frappée du tonnerre. Peu-à-peu un feu brillant étincela de ses yeux, qui d'abord avoient été clairs et fixes; tout con être fut anime comme électriquement; on voyoit se passer en elle la plus singulière metamorphose.'

*Reggio*. However, as Heather Belnap Jensen observes, there are social as well as medical implications for a female spectator:

the tale seems intent upon emphasizing that the woman's adoption of the position of viewer can make her senseless to the fact that she—and not just the artwork—become the spectacle, and hence, the woman spectator risks personal health and the loss of decorum in the eyes of the public.<sup>51</sup>

Such danger is noted in medical texts, including Nicolas Chambon de Montaux's *Des Maladies des femmes* (1784), which suggest that a woman's nervous system could suffer permanent damage from over-stimulation.<sup>52</sup> In line with medical discourse of the period, the girl described viewing the Apollo Belvedere becomes deranged, and has to be dragged away; the moral message that 'it would have been better for her had she never seen the statues' reinforcing concerns regarding female spectatorship.<sup>53</sup> However, Belnap Jensen's research into *The Journal des Dames et des Modes* identifies a less 'derogatory' instance, whereby a model is shown opening a portfolio to view a female nude in an 1801 fashion plate.<sup>54</sup> The potential for same-sex desire amongst women is overlooked, or positioned as less of a threat.

As a lover of her own sex, Damer would supposedly be immune to a dangerously erotic viewing experience when sculpting the male form. However, if we return to Darwin's 'Economy of Vegetation', this poem particularly highlights the lasting physiological effects of viewing sculpture; the beauty of Damer's work having the transformative power to 'warm' the beholder for generations to come. The *warming* sensation described is akin to sexual arousal, with Damer's legacy metaphorically propagated. Even if Damer can be trusted to work from male models, her work can still have an erotic effect upon the viewer. In *The*

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<sup>51</sup> Heather Belnap Jensen, 'The Journal des Dames et des Modes: Fashioning Women in the Arts, c. 1800-1815', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, 5.1 (Spring 2006), 33-53 (p. 45).

<sup>52</sup> See Nicolas Chambon de Montaux, *Des Maladies des femmes*, 2 vols (Paris: Hôtel Serpente, 1784).

<sup>53</sup> Anon, 'La Provençale devant l'Apollon du Belvédère, au Musée Napoléon,' pp. 207-08.

<sup>54</sup> Belnap Jensen, 'The Journal des Dames et des Modes: Fashioning Women in the Arts', p. 46.

*Damerian Apollo*, the female companion who watches on, her lifted hand strategically preserving the modesty of the naked Apollo holding a raised, phallic spear, could easily be led astray. The ‘studies from nature’ surrounding Damer include a heterosexual couple to provide a point of comparison to her deviant behaviour. Not only is Damer challenging the ‘natural order’ by casting a violent blow to Apollo, the male embodiment of the arts, but in terms of her flagrant disregard for following a conventional, heteronormative lifestyle. Eschewing biological reproduction, her artwork becomes her unnatural offspring.

Damer’s statue of Apollo no longer survives, having been destroyed when the theatre burnt down in 1809. What’s more, there is no evidence actually linking Damer to the completed work. Sterckx acknowledges that although the statue continues to be credited to Damer, it is so ‘without certainty’. However, if indeed by Damer ‘it is probably the first public statue [...] by a woman to be displayed in London, and maybe even in Europe or the western world.’ For Sterckx ‘this ambitious entry of a woman into an urban, public space may explain the vehemence of the Holland image.’<sup>55</sup>

One strategy for satisfying curiosity and counteracting the rumours was to allow visitors into her studio to watch her work. Jonathan David Gross describes this practice as something akin to her enthusiasm for private theatricals, noting the performative aspect to her open door policy. However, Damer did tire of the attention, confiding to Mary Berry her annoyance: ‘I have been teased and tired to death with the number of persons coming to see me. However flattering this impressement, to have the plague of popularity and load of abuse is hard.’<sup>56</sup> The female companion in *The Damerian Apollo* alludes not merely to her ‘open door policy’, but insinuates a romantic involvement between the pair, as Hester Lynch Piozzi

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<sup>55</sup> Marjam Sterckx, ‘Pride and Prejudice: Eighteenth-century Women Sculptors and their Material Practices’, p. 91.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Seymour Damer, Letter to Mary Berry, 16 May 1791, in *The Berry Papers*, p. 27.

mocked: “‘Tis a joke in London now to say such a one visits Mrs Damer.’<sup>57</sup> Elfenbein adds the following benefit of attracting visitors to her studio: ‘Since they belonged to the best families, they confirmed that Damer belonged to a privileged class even though she had an unladylike occupation.’<sup>58</sup> However, Cunningham’s biography insists that Damer actually wanted to escape her own aristocratic identity, prioritizing her role as a sculptor:

Descended as she was from some of the most ancient families in Britain, she was desirous to let hereditary dignity sink, that the dignity of genius might have ampler scope to rise; and was not without hopes that she should hear before she died the public voice hail her as Damer the sculptor, rather than as the Honorable Mrs. Damer, daughter of the Seymours, the Conways, and the Campbells.<sup>59</sup>

The idea that Damer ‘repeatedly declared that she preferred the distinction of being an artist to any other that could be offered her’<sup>60</sup> is emphasised in *The Annual Biography and Obituary*. Even though she wanted to distance herself from aristocratic amateurs and possible claims that she had more influence than talent, her status provided her with the opportunities she needed to succeed. Emma Donoghue notes the paradox that aspects of Damer’s life which led to criticism or rumour also protected her, citing ‘her financial independence, commitment to her art, and strong support from influential family and friends’ as key features which ‘acted to cushion her from the worst effects of such rumours’.<sup>61</sup>

Damer’s intersectional identity as an aristocratic woman, an ardent Whig, and passionate friend to her intimate circle of female companions makes it difficult to separate Damer’s identity as an artist from these other aspects of her life. When Damer died her request that she be buried with her sculptor’s tools and apron was fulfilled; her instructions revealing that she wanted her work to be her legacy. Although Damer is primarily

<sup>57</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi, 9 December 1795, *Thraliana: the Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*, Vol. 2: 1784-1809 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 949.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, pp. 257-58.

<sup>60</sup> Anon, *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, p. 126.

<sup>61</sup> Donoghue, ‘Random Shafts of Malice?’, p. 146.

remembered for her work as a sculptor, it should not be forgotten that she also displayed talent as an amateur actress in private theatricals and also published a novel. This novel provides an insight into the struggles faced by an artistic heroine who lacks Damer's privileged position in society, commenting upon issues of ancestry and patrilineal inheritance in what can be read as a critique of heteronormative ideals.

### **Challenging the Patriarchal Order in *Belmour***

Published in 1801, although likely completed by 1797, Anne Seymour Damer's only novel has been interpreted as an autobiographical response to her relationship with Mary Berry. In his Introduction to the modern edition of *Belmour*, Jonathan David Gross describes Berry as Damer's muse and reads the novel as an example of literary cross-dressing, quoting letters exchanged between the pair as evidence showing that the novel brought them together in a meeting of minds, if not physically.<sup>62</sup> When, in April 1797, Berry writes to Damer to apologize for not coming to see her she states that 'you ought not to be affronted at it when I tell you I am going to pass an hour with Lord Belmour', elaborating with the addendum, 'I dare say we shall both of us think of you'.<sup>63</sup> The reading of Lord Belmour as a figuration of Damer herself is given credence by the poetic epigraph Lady Ailesbury added to the text in her daughter's voice: 'Don't think me a conceited Elf, | I took the Models from myself',<sup>64</sup> the reference to 'models' here punning on Damer's sculptural practice and linking the two forms of creativity.

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<sup>62</sup> Jonathan David Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour: A Modern Edition* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. xvii.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Berry, Letter to Anne Seymour Damer, April 1797, in Anne Seymour Damer Notebooks, 1791-97. 4 vols., Lewis Walpole Library, New Haven, CT., 4: 71, quoted in Jonathan David Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xvii.

<sup>64</sup> Lady Ailesbury, Epigraph: 'The Author Is Supposed to Speak', handwritten in the Lewis Walpole Library copy of Anne Seymour Damer, *Belmour*, 3 vols. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1801), quoted in Jonathan David Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xxii.

Andrew Elfenbein has described *Belmour* as a coded lesbian narrative, citing the close friendship between the heroine, Emily Melville, and her mentor, Mrs Stainville, as illustrative of the propensity for heterosexual relationships to destroy female friendships,<sup>65</sup> as Lord Raymond's attentions towards Emily incite her friend's jealousy. As noted at the outset of this chapter, it continues to be debated whether Damer's loving and supportive 'romantic friendships' with women can be termed lesbian relationships in the modern sense of the term. However, whether or not she had sex with women is irrelevant. What is relevant in terms of the scope of this chapter is how rumours regarding Damer's sexuality influence the portrayal of women artists. Elfenbein suggests that Damer's social standing as a well-connected aristocratic widow is what placed her outside of patriarchal control, allowing her to pursue her talent, as well as other women. Elfenbein thus aligns Damer's writing with her sculpture by positioning them both as methods 'for countering rumours' about her sexuality.<sup>66</sup>

Arguing that the novel is used by Damer as a means of asserting her conventionality, he elaborates by suggesting that her work 'denies the marginality that such rumors imposed on her by showing her ability to participate in major literary trends of the day, such as the psychological novel.'<sup>67</sup> According to Elfenbein, *Belmour*, unlike many other novels of the 1790s, is not overtly political: '*Belmour* is remarkable for avoiding incidents that might have made it controversial in the charged political atmosphere of the 1790s'.<sup>68</sup> Responding to the argument that *Belmour* is not overtly polemical or political, a queer reading of this text will show how Damer challenges the received wisdom of parent and guardian figures in relation to marriage choices.

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<sup>65</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 116.

<sup>66</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 108.

<sup>68</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 108.

With Damer herself having been persuaded to enter a marriage with disastrous consequences, she uses the novel to challenge the notion of parental authority in regards to matters of the heart. Lord Belmour is intended for his cousin, Lady Clementina Alton, and not wishing to disobey his father's dying wish that they marry, he initially tries to ignore his feelings for Emily Melville, an orphaned artist of uncertain origins who comes to live with the Rector on the Belmour estate. Nevertheless, the wedding does not go ahead, but a misunderstanding means that Emily believes Belmour has married Clementina when she accepts the hand of her aged suitor, Mr Courtenay. *Belmour* was published after the peak of rumours regarding Damer's sexuality had passed, and whilst the focus is on a heterosexual relationship, it has been read otherwise. The political message is still present as Damer uses the artist heroine as a means to deal with the precarious position of women within a heteronormative, patriarchal society. Where Elfenbein suggests that Damer avoids 'the spectacular incidents of Radcliffe',<sup>69</sup> Gross argues that *Belmour* can in fact be seen as a Gothic novel.<sup>70</sup> Whilst not strictly a Gothic tale, it is inspired by Radcliffe in terms of the presentation of an artistic heroine and the concern with uncertain origins, aristocratic ancestry, and inheritance.

In many ways, Emily Melville is a typical heroine of sentimental fiction; left orphaned and subsequently neglected by her aristocratic relatives, Emily is raised by Dr Stanmore, a Horace Walpolesque figure who cares for and educates his young charge. Although Emily technically has aristocratic pedigree, the fact that her parents married without parental consent has left her cut off from her family and, thus, unlikely to make a good marriage:

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<sup>69</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, p. 108.

<sup>70</sup> Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xxxiv - xlv.

The growing beauties of her form, the natural elegance of her manners, together with her superior understanding, seemed well to entitle her to the hope of contracting some marriage, that might place her in that rank of life, to which by birth she had a right – yet this was an uncertainty; and the total want of fortune, the cruel neglect, and, indeed, treachery of her nearest relations, increased the chances against her. – Dr. Stanmore, therefore, made it the great object of his education, to render her mind equal to any situation, in which she might be placed.<sup>71</sup>

Without the independent means to support herself, Emily is passed from male protector to male protector, whether in the form of a mentor and educator like Dr Stanmore, a temporary guardian like Mr Rycot and Mr Enstien, or a husband. Although fate serendipitously brings Emily and Belmour together when she is sent to live with Mr Rycot and his wife at the rectory near Belmour Castle, the uncertainty surrounding Emily's status and a sense of misguided duty to their respective parents and guardians serve to keep the couple apart. When Emily agrees to marry Mr Courtenay it is out of a misplaced sense of duty to Dr Stanmore, as she believes a union with a man who can protect and provide for her will make him happy.

Emily's background remains a mystery until Chapter Eleven, when Dr Stanmore recounts the melancholy tale to an inquisitive Lord Belmour. Emily's parents had fallen in love and married without consent, leaving them disinherited. Following the untimely death of both her parents, Dr Stanmore had become Emily's sole guardian. *The Monthly Review* end their assessment of *Belmour* with the observation: 'The narrative would have been better conducted, if the early life of Miss Melville had not been introduced so late, as an episode.'<sup>72</sup> However, Jonathan David Gross suggests that Damer 'plots her novel to heighten the reader's experience of the uncanny',<sup>73</sup> positioning the work as a Gothic novel.

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<sup>71</sup> Anne Seymour Damer, *Belmour: A Modern Edition* ed. by Jonathan David Gross (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. 188.

<sup>72</sup> Anon. 'Art. 21. *Belmour*', *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, enlarged: From May to August, inclusive*, Vol. XXXVIII, ed. by George Edward Griffiths (London: R. Griffiths, 1802), p. 314.

<sup>73</sup> Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xl.

Arguing that *Belmour* can be categorized as a Gothic Romance despite the absence of the supernatural, or the indeed explained supernatural, Gross cites the cyclical rather than linear narrative as a means of fostering a feeling of unfamiliar familiarity or *deja vu*. Whilst not a Gothic novel *per se*, *Belmour* is the literary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in terms of the concern with ancestral lineage and rightful inheritance. Walpole's 'Gothic Story' infamously opens with the giant helmet falling from a statue, crushing the sickly son and heir of Manfred before his marriage, thus, disrupting the line of inheritance. In the novel, art acts as a portent, revealing the illegitimacy of Manfred's rule and the rightful claim of the noble peasant, Theodore.<sup>74</sup> Although lacking *Otranto*'s medieval setting, supernatural events, or a Gothic castle as the site of female persecution, *Belmour* takes the idea that men control women through marriage and that art can reveal truths, but is more inspired by the novels of Ann Radcliffe.

Despite there being no conclusive evidence that Damer read Radcliffe's work, Gross argues that Damer 'drew on Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* to depict how art draws lovers together in uncanny ways.'<sup>75</sup> Not only do the heroines of *Udolpho* and *Belmour* share the name Emily, but the novels also share passages of landscape description, along with a concern with issues of guardianship, melancholia, sensibility, serendipitous meetings, characters fated to be together, and heroines 'haunted' by absent lovers. According to Gross, in the mould of a Radcliffian heroine, Damer's Emily shows how art 'can attract like-minded souls in places as far flung as Venice, Bologna, and London'.<sup>76</sup> Akin to a Radcliffian narrative, the novel opens with *Belmour*'s fascination for the mysterious singing he hears, mirroring episodes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* when music serves to bring couples together.

<sup>74</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. by Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xxxiv. See Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. by Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Gross, 'Introduction' to *Belmour*, p. xxxiii.

Just as Vivaldi is first attracted to hearing Ellena sing in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Belmour is first drawn to Emily's voice:

He heard a soft female voice go through a favourite Italian ballad, with the most touching expression. The well-known words were melancholic, and brought a thousand recollections to his mind; while the plaintive tone, in which they were uttered, appeared to sympathise with his own feelings.<sup>77</sup>

The familiar song stimulates Belmour's memories of Italy, awakening feelings of nostalgia. The primacy of sound in this situation means that Emily's voice can feel familiar without him having seen her before. A week later when he is finally introduced to the mysterious songstress by the rector: 'he thought he saw a half smile on her lips, which she immediately checked, that seemed at first to indicate some former acquaintance, or recollection – yet he was *very* sure, he never had elsewhere seen her'.<sup>78</sup> Damer redresses the power dynamic by privileging the female gaze when it is later revealed that Emily has been physically attracted to Belmour all along. Switching the gaze from Radcliffe's *The Italian*, whereby Vivaldi first appraises Ellena from afar whilst attending mass, in *Belmour* it is Emily who is first captivated by the fine gentleman she notices in the church of the Mendicanti during her travels in Italy. Resigned to the fact that she will never see him again, or even get to know his name, she draws him into her sketches; a pastime which nurtures her own melancholic pleasure, rather than something pursued to attract his attention.

It is only when Belmour views Emily's sketches from her time in Italy that he realizes that she had noted, and recorded, his presence without them ever actually having met. Whilst sound provides an initial feeling, vision confirms it, with the following passage of free indirect discourse revealing Belmour's mental process of interpreting the images before him:

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<sup>77</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 23.

The drawings in particular attracted his attention: they were views, evidently original, of different parts of Italy, and various buildings, both ancient and modern, of that country, enlivened by figures, and executed in a free and masterly style. Among many of Venice, the church of the Mendicanti was often repeated, and various views given of the inside of the building. On farther examination among the figures on the foreground, one always presented itself so like his own, that he thought – could it have been possible – but it must be fancy – yet it was always represented in the very cloak he wore, on the very bench he sat, where he had often passed whole hours in listening to the divine music repeated from the grated gallery above. – Yet he had sitten for no portrait while at Venice – and again it must be fancy.<sup>79</sup>

With echoes of the term ‘Old Master’, the use of the term ‘masterly’ particularly highlights Emily’s skill as an artist. Damer’s practice of inserting an ideal lover into her heroine’s sketches reflects an episode in Regina Maria Roche’s 1798 novel *Clermont*.<sup>80</sup> In the mould of a Radcliffian heroine, Roche’s Madeline is a skilled artist whose ‘fanciful drawings’<sup>81</sup> adorn the walls of the cottage where she has been raised in rural isolation by her father. Like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Madeline first encounters her future love, de Sevignie, through some lines of verse he leaves engraved on the walls of the ruined castle where she likes to walk. When Madeline explores further, she is startled to see a stranger sketching and flees the scene. The sketch in question is subsequently discovered by the servant, Janette, who shows it to Madeline:

She now found it to be a highly-finished landscape of the castle and surrounding scenes, in which a small female figure was conspicuously drawn. This bore so great a resemblance to her own person, that she had no doubt of its being designed for her. Such an indication of attachment touched her young and simple heart more perhaps than the most impassioned declaration could have accomplished.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 136.

<sup>80</sup> The process can also be compared to that of extra-illustration, whereby texts are personalized with the addition of illustrative prints. Freya Gowrley’s research into Damer’s extra-illustrated copy of *A Description of the Villa of Horace Walpole (1774)* positions this as an alternate means of claiming ownership of Strawberry Hill, creating a queer legacy for their family home. See Gowrley, *Domestic Space in Britain, 1750-1840: Materiality, Sociability and Emotion* (forthcoming, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

<sup>81</sup> Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont*, ed. by Natalie Schroeder (Chicago, Illinois: Valancourt Books, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> Roche, *Clermont*, p. 17.

The interpretation that sketching a recognizable figure into a drawing has a romantic meaning is a trope reused by Damer, as is the assumption that physical perfection can denote moral perfection.

Belmour not only provides perspective and scale, serving to enliven her architectural images, but also signifies her perceived ideal of manhood from which she can measure her suitors. Belmour, in contrast to other men she meets, appears to have ‘so much dignity and grace, a look so commanding, and yet so sweet’.<sup>83</sup> The melancholy focus he maintains listening to music, whether in church or in the theatre, suggests that he is a kindred spirit. Emily, however, remains rational, not ever expecting to meet Belmour in person: ‘Although Emily now wholly abandoned the idea of discovering the stranger’s name, and even the probability of ever seeing him again, still she retained his image in her mind, with a mixture of pleasure and melancholy; in which, in spite of reason, she felt a sort of satisfaction.’<sup>84</sup> When Emily returns to England and is sent to stay at the rectory near Belmour Castle she is shocked to encounter the stranger from her Italian tour, and sets about researching his family portraits as a means of satisfying her curiosity by learning all she can about him through art. In an episode pre-empting the pivotal gallery scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, Emily plans to visit the castle during the family’s absence and aims to use the portraits as a means to learn what she can about Belmour’s character.<sup>85</sup> In the surroundings of his ancestral home, surrounded by portraits of his forebears, she can ‘See him anew’.<sup>86</sup> Although Emily makes a favourable comparison between her imagined ideal and the real life Belmour, neither of them are perfect.

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<sup>83</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 248.

<sup>84</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 253.

<sup>85</sup> The phrase ‘pride and prejudice’ is used twice in *Belmour*.

<sup>86</sup> Gross, ‘Introduction’ to *Belmour*, p. xl.

Dr Stanmore has educated Emily to be rational. Even though she is prone to ‘thought and reflection’,<sup>87</sup> dwelling on the past in melancholy reverie, she possesses the strength of mind to make this a productive force. Rather than something pathologically debilitating, Emily’s melancholia is channelled into her art, and she is a precursor to Jane Austen’s Elinor Dashwood in this respect.<sup>88</sup> In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne’s grief is perpetuated by the music she plays as she selfishly indulges her emotions, whereas her sister Elinor is able to put her work and her feelings aside to care for her family. Art is a powerful force in Damer’s novel, not only in terms of driving the plot, but in regulating her heroine’s mind: ‘The masterly manner, in which Emily could exert the various talents she possessed, rendered them a serious advantage to her, and increased that independence of mind, which belongs to superior characters.’<sup>89</sup> Once again the adjective ‘masterly’ is applied to Emily, suggesting that she has the fortitude to cope with the kind of melancholy artistic temperament Vasari describes halting the career of Properzia De’ Rossi after ‘she felt she had expressed in part her own most burning passion’.<sup>90</sup> In his introduction to *Belmour*, Gross emphasizes the significance of melancholy in the text, noting that the word melancholy is itself used no less than forty-six times.<sup>91</sup> Damer’s correspondence with Mary Berry reveals that she suffered from melancholia, especially during periods of separation from her beloved friend, confessing the following in a letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1803:

Much it grieves me to think how much I have with my melancholy dashed your comfort, for so it is. Not, I know, that you would have had me suppress the feelings from which I have suffered, or endeavour to conceal them from you, but writing can never be like speaking, and we have both suffered not only from ‘*les contretemps*’ but from ‘*les maux de l’absence*’.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 262.

<sup>88</sup> Also, like Elinor, Emily does not believe that her suitor should sacrifice a prior engagement.

<sup>89</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 253.

<sup>90</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, p. 341. Although Vasari heralds De’ Rossi’s talent, it is limited to something biographically inspired by unrequited love, which cannot be sustained. There will be more on Poperzia De’ Rossi and unrequited love in the next chapter, when I turn to analyse Felcia Hemans’s poem about her.

<sup>91</sup> Gross, ‘Introduction’ to *Belmour*, p. xlv.

<sup>92</sup> Anne Seymour Damer, Letter to Mary Berry, 28 March 1803, *Berry Papers*, p. 239.

The use of French, whilst not unusual amongst ladies of fashion, recalls the accusations of Sapphism levelled at Marie Antoinette's inner circle by giving a sentimental, loving tone to a discussion of absence when the suffering described could otherwise have been treated as a malady. Absence is a key theme in *Belmour* as circumstances keep the young lovers apart. However, Emily's rational education provides her with the strength to persevere.

Although Stanmore's programme of education has equipped Emily with the means to support herself and the fortitude to prevent her 'from now starting at the idea of acquiring support and independence by your own talents' should this be the path her future takes, her mentor remains adamant that 'this is not a brilliant prospect'.<sup>93</sup> When artist heroines resort to selling their work, it is usually presented as a last resort, as is the case with Miss Burt in *Munster Village* following her elopement. Ellena Rosalba in *The Italian* is a notable exception in that whilst her work is driven by necessity, she is able to provide a stable, steady income producing copies; she is not on a downward slope whereby selling art could be seen as something akin to selling her body, as in *The Victim of Prejudice*. In *Belmour*, Emily is not fazed by the idea of selling her work for subsistence so much as being left alone in the world:

[...] it was not the want of fortune, or even the necessity of employing her talents for her subsistence, that deeply affected her; but her idea, that when she lost her kind protector, she lost her all on earth, and should remain a lonely, insulated, wandering being in this wide world.<sup>94</sup>

In this case, marrying to reassure her guardian is preferable, even if the suitor in question is old and ailing, given that Emily's obscure origins seemingly bar her union with the man she

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<sup>93</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 262.

<sup>94</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 262.

truly loves.<sup>95</sup> Emily's choice to marry Courtenay reflects the difficulties and stigma she would face as an isolated woman artist without any money or connections.

In fact, Emily's decision to marry is based on the false assumption that Courtenay is a rich landowner, when in fact his estate is crumbling around him and he is in financial difficulties. Dean Abbey may not represent a Gothic site of torture and terror, but it reveals that Courtenay is an unsuitable caretaker, and it is telling that Belmour is at liberty to renew his courtship of Emily here:

Emily frequently strolled out, carrying with her implements for drawing, and amused herself with sketching the many picturesque and rural spots in the immediate neighbourhood of Cheltenham. – Belmour had, one day, accidentally met her, and she appeared not displeased at his approach, he ventured again the next morning to join her, finding her occupied in the same manner, and, from that time, they habitually met, nearly at the same hour Emily seated herself on the trunk of a tree, and Belmour on the ground by her side.<sup>96</sup>

As a shared activity, sketching provides a means of re-establishing their courtship, challenging the established patriarchal order. Art has the capacity to reunite them as a couple by providing a secret means of communication, with a layer of implied meaning only understood by the artist and sitter. Belmour realises that Emily must have loved him all along when he recognizes himself in some of her sketches from Italy, and by alluding to these images he is able to communicate his knowledge to the artist:

“I saw several drawings of yours,” said Belmour, “when I was at Dr. Stanmore's, which, I am sure, prove your perfect knowledge of perspective.” – His eyes were fixed on the pencil he was cutting, as he spoke, and his voice trembled – he was conscious, that he meant something more, than his words seemed to imply.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The influence of Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) can be seen here given the ambiguous status of Evelina's parentage, coupled with the social-climbing aspirations of her newly-discovered extended family, make a union with Lord Orville seem beyond her reach. See Frances Burney, *Evelina; Or, the History of A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, ed. by Edward A. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 149.

<sup>97</sup> Damer, *Belmour*, p. 150.

The fact that this conversation takes place in her marital home, with Emily's husband present, did not go unnoticed by reviewers. *The Monthly Review* initially praised the novel, stating: 'Considerable talents are here displayed in the support and delineation of characters, accompanied by many just reflections, and a knowledge of the world.'<sup>98</sup> However, it was precisely this 'knowledge of the world' which led them to criticize Lord Belmour's 'libertine behaviour', as he accepts the hospitality of Lord Rosenberg and later Mr Courtenay whilst pursuing intimate friendships with their wives. *The Monthly Review* also question the virtue of the heroine by noting that Emily continues to encourage the attentions of Belmour after her marriage to Courtenay. Whilst the reviewer could not 'deem that the author's moral sentiments quite correct', *Belmour* does provide an insight into aristocratic marriage, the precarious position of women artists, and the choices they must make. The difficulties faced by Emily and Belmour do not necessarily condone the disobeyal of parental authority, but the novel does reveal the importance of honest communication and the absurdity in following edicts from beyond the grave. Furthermore, the paper trail of Emily's artistic output is favoured over her family tree in terms of the power to reveal her identity and her emotions.

The novel ends happily for Emily and Belmour when the patriarchal order is broken; the death of the ailing Courtenay coupled with Belmour's willingness to go against his dead father's wishes means that they can finally marry. Whilst it is unconventional for a heroine of this period to secure a second marriage, this is a novel concerned with second chances and the wider acceptance of human failings.<sup>99</sup> Even though *The Monthly Review* question Emily's behaviour, her old husband proclaims her virtue and thanks her for making him happy on his death bed to counter any accusations of unfaithfulness. Alison Yarrington argues that the fact

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<sup>98</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, p. 314.

<sup>99</sup> *The Sylph*, a text which it has already been suggested took inspiration from Damer's life, is one such novel to have a heroine find happiness in her second marriage rather than as an inexperienced young virgin bride, but in both cases a prior connection is privileged, promoting the conventional message of the first love as true love. In contrast to *Belmour*, Madame de Staël's novel, *Corinne* (1807), to be discussed in the next chapter, shows the tragic consequences of a parental edict.

that Damer gifted copies of the novel to female friends, including the edition to Madame Houdon now held by the Lewis Walpole Library, suggests that she did not perceive it as a scandalous text. Madame Houdon, a distant relation of Damer who was herself married to a sculptor,<sup>100</sup> edited the French translation of *Belmour* (1802) and penned a preface lauding Damer as a ‘femme célèbre par son esprit et ses rares talents, sur-tout dans la Musique at dans la sculpture.’<sup>101</sup> The celebration of Damer for her talents is something continued by *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, who raise sculpture from the realms of manual labour to characterize it as a lofty, intellectual pursuit by noting the positive influence of such activities on women of rank:

There are few more gratifying spectacles than that of a woman of rank, beauty, and accomplishments disdaining the frivolous, and too frequently vicious pursuits, by which so many females in the higher circles of society are unhappily absorbed, and occupying herself with studies of an intellectual character; studies, the tendency of which is to refine and elevate the tone of her mind, to secure to her sound, rational, and permanent enjoyment, and, eventually, to place her name among those whom posterity will contemplate with feelings of admiration and respect.<sup>102</sup>

In this text, sculpture is seen as a virtuous pastime for aristocratic women who could otherwise fall into idleness and dissipation. Hannah Cowley’s play *The Town Before You* presents this same message through its portrayal of an aristocratic sculptor based on Damer. Although Cowley acknowledges the Sapphic associations of women who sculpt, Lady Horatia Horton is a character who serves to widen the scope for women’s art to be accepted.

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<sup>100</sup> Madame Houdon’s adoptive mother had married Horace Walpole’s cousin, Thomas.

<sup>101</sup> Alison Yarrington, ‘Anne Seymour Damer: a sculptor of ‘republican perfection’, in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 81-99 (p. 87).

<sup>102</sup> Anon, ‘The Honourable Anne Seymour Damer’, *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, Vol. 13 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), pp. 125-36 (p. 125).

### Female Virtue in Hannah Cowley's *The Town Before You*

Born in Tiverton, Devon in 1743, Hannah Cowley had literary heritage given that her paternal grandmother's cousin was the poet and dramatist, John Gay (1685-1732). Although her talent could easily have been considered as hereditary genius, the obituary printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1809) positions her 'fancy' for writing as an 'accidental' discovery later in life.<sup>103</sup> According to the character sketch provided, a trip to the theatre had first inspired Cowley to write. The anecdote recounted describes how she had turned to her husband during the performance to proclaim: "I too can write!"<sup>104</sup> Despite being 'rallied by him for her presumption',<sup>105</sup> she had returned home and written the first act of a play by the next day, displaying similar tenacity to Damer when 'dared' by Hume to sculpt. The writer of this short article similarly emphasizes Cowley's suitability for the role of playwright by noting the ease with which she could compose a work: 'Nothing was laboured; all was spontaneous effusion.'<sup>106</sup> However, unlike Damer, who prized her identity as an artist, Cowley had to balance the roles of writer with her family life, and the memoir is careful to separate her private and public identities, noting that: 'In the different characters of daughter, wife, and mother, Mrs. Cowley's conduct was exemplary'.<sup>107</sup> She achieved this by remaining modest: writing for pleasure rather than for fame, 'she wore her laurels gracefully veiled'.<sup>108</sup> In emphasizing that 'there was nothing about her of that style which sometimes indicates the *writer*',<sup>109</sup> Cowley is distanced from the stock comedic character of the 'learned woman'.

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<sup>103</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle*, Vol. 79 (London: Printed by John Nicholson and son, 1809), pp. 377-78 (p. 377).

<sup>104</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

<sup>105</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

<sup>106</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

<sup>107</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

<sup>108</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

<sup>109</sup> Anon. 'Biographical Character of the Late Mrs. Cowley', p. 377.

Although careful to prioritize the view of Cowley, the woman, ahead of Cowley, the writer, sculpting provides a means of describing her artistry in the preface to Cowley's *Works* (1813), with her practice likened to that of Michelangelo:

She was much pleased with the description of Michael Angelo [sic] making the marble fly around him as he was chiselling with the utmost swiftness, that he might shape, however roughly, his whole design in unity with one clear conception. If she found she could not proceed swiftly, she gave up what she had undertaken. Many were the instances in which she was known to compose quicker than a careful Amanuensis could copy. [...] The task of finishing was little consonant with her Vivacity, and her works were sometimes laid open to the Public – before the extraneous matter after HER first chiselling was cleared away.<sup>110</sup>

The idea of ease is used to proclaim her genius, with the speed of her work used to answer the criticism that her work was often released before the finer details had been honed; the metaphorical comparison between writing and sculpting recalling the critique received by Damer's work for being in need of more polish. However, the comparison made to Michelangelo works to raise her status as someone with the skill to succeed in a masculine domain. The comparison of writing to sculpture recalls the paragone debates surrounding the status of the arts in Renaissance Italy. According to Leonardo Da Vinci, painting was to be considered a liberal art, akin to poetry, but the physical labour required of sculpture barred it from being similarly categorized as a dignified, intellectual pursuit: 'I do not find any other difference between painting and sculpture than that the sculptor's work entails greater physical effort and the painter's greater mental effort.'<sup>111</sup> However, by likening writing to sculpting it positions both arts on an equal footing, as when Vasari likens the achievements of Properzia De' Rossi to the poet Sappho.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Anon, 'Preface' to *The Works of Mrs. Hannah Cowley* (London: Wilkie and Robinson, 1813), p. xv.

<sup>111</sup> Leonardo Da Vinci, *Paragone: a Comparison of the Arts by Leonardo Da Vinci*, trans. by Irma A. Richter (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 94.

<sup>112</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, p. 339. Also, see Sally Quin, 'Describing the Female Sculptor in Early Modern Italy: An Analysis of the *vita* of Properzia de' Rossi in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*', *Gender & History*, 24.1 (April 2012), 134-49, for a more detailed account of Vasari's tactic of positioning of De' Rossi in relation to other learned women.

The preface to the *Works* also discusses the differences between Cowley's writing and early-nineteenth-century theatre, citing the tendency of modern plays to 'paint from lower life',<sup>113</sup> whereas Cowley excels in her presentation of aristocratic women:

The reader's expectation that she should excel in delineating Females will not be disappointed. Indeed one of the circumstances in which her Dramas differ from the more modern plays is – that Women are generally made the Leading Characters. Her favourite idea of female character is – a combination of the present innocence of Conduct with the greatest vivacity of Manners.<sup>114</sup>

Lady Horatia Horton, the aristocratic sculptor of Cowley's play *The Town Before You*, is such a figure of female virtue.

When Hannah Cowley's last play was performed on the London stage, audiences did not fail to recognise that the character of Lady Horatia Horton had a real-life precedent in the shape of Anne Seymour Damer. The *Analytical Review* remarked that the inclusion of a female sculptor was 'not without personal allusion, too strongly marked.'<sup>115</sup> The *Monthly Review* went a step further, stating in no uncertain terms that '*Lady Horatia Horton* seems to be a drawing from *Mrs. Damer*, whose birth, beauty, and talents, have sufficiently rendered her an object of observation.'<sup>116</sup> As the most notable woman sculptor working in England at the time, it was easy for audiences to assume that there was a connection. The reviewer goes on to acknowledge that Damer's 'passion for sculpture has not always escaped ridicule', but notes that 'through the organ of *Conway*, a sensible young man of fashion, [...] Mrs. Cowley had made no feeble defence of it'.<sup>117</sup> Cowley knew Damer, having been introduced to her by

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<sup>113</sup> Anon, 'Preface' to *The Works of Mrs. Hannah Cowley*, p. xi.

<sup>114</sup> Anon, 'Preface' to *The Works of Mrs. Hannah Cowley*, p. x.

<sup>115</sup> Anon, 'Art XXI. *The Town Before You*, a Comedy, as acted at the Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden', *The Analytical Review; Or, History of Literature*, Vol. 21: January-June 1795 (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1795), pp. 399-402 (p. 399).

<sup>116</sup> Anon, 'Art. XIX. *The Town Before You*. A Comedy, as acted at the Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden', *The Monthly Review; Or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 16: January-April 1795 (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, 1795), pp. 329-32 (p. 330).

<sup>117</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, p. 330.

Richard and Maria Cosway, but Andrew Elfenbein has questioned the choice to allude to the sculptor, noting that Cosway ‘might have chosen far less controversial female figures, such as a respectable novelist like Frances Burney, as a model.’<sup>118</sup> However, this would miss the point, which, he states, is ‘to find a new, exemplary role for aristocratic women.’<sup>119</sup> The defence of the woman artist in *The Town Before You* is in fact a defence of the aristocratic woman artist. Another review identified by Angela Escott during her research into Cowley’s works attests that even though the figure of a woman sculptor was unusual, and somewhat eccentric, the character Cowley presents is exemplary:

Lady Horatia Horton is an original, so much so that we find it very difficult to reconcile the general tenour of her character with reason or probability. It affords, however, some tolerable good lessons of morality and propriety of female deportment.<sup>120</sup>

Cowley plays upon the negative associations of dissipated aristocratic women to present the aristocratic woman artist as a positive alternative by showing that an eccentric love of the arts is more moral than the usual hedonistic pursuits of the bon-ton.

The action of *The Town Before You* centres around the studio of Lady Horatia Horton, a doyenne of fashionable high society with a passion for sculpture. Men and women alike are drawn to watch her work, and the circle of friends gathered around Horatia mimics that of Anne Seymour Damer and Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. In the play, Georgina is an impressionable young girl who is particularly keen to make the acquaintance of Horton in the hope of being tutored by her (the name Georgina a barely disguised form of Georgiana). In his biography of Damer, Jonathan David Gross suggests that Damer was seen as having a bad

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<sup>118</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, ‘Lesbian Aestheticism on the Eighteenth-Century Stage’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 25.1 (Winter 2001), 1-16 (p. 6).

<sup>119</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, ‘Lesbian Aestheticism on the Eighteenth-Century Stage’, p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted by Angela Escott from a newspaper cutting of an unattributed review of the first production of *The Town Before You*, Theatre Museum, G.E. 3131. See Angela Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley: Experiments in Dramatic Genre, 1776-1794* (London and New York: Routledge: 2016) p. 185.

influence on the Duchess.<sup>121</sup> However, in the play *Lady Horatia* is a positive role model for Georgina, an upwardly mobile Welsh heiress who has yet to come out in society. Sculpture is presented as a suitable pastime for aristocratic ladies who have the time and money to pursue their interest in the arts; as Jenny informs Georgina: ‘All arts are to be learnt by those who have money, except the art of being happy’.<sup>122</sup> Georgina approaches Horatia with the aim of learning to sculpt so that she can make a model of her suitor, Mr Conway: ‘I then shou’d be able to look at him without blushing, and even talk to him without his being a bit the wiser’.<sup>123</sup> In using sculpture as a means to learn to control her emotions the art form will, thus, enable her to develop composed behaviour and provide a positive influence on the giddy young girl.

However, sculpture is not universally viewed with approval in *The Town Before You*. Sir Simon, the uncle of Horatia’s suitor, Mr Asgill, does not approve of his nephew’s love for a sculptress, repeatedly exclaiming his utter distaste for her occupation: ‘A hewer of marble! why he may as well live in a quarry’.<sup>124</sup> When Sir Simon compares her works to the Medusa, describing how ‘she chisels out womens’ faces with young serpents hanging in drop curls, by way of a new fashion’d tete’,<sup>125</sup> he not only characterizes the sculptures as fashionable monstrosities, but also aligns Horatia with the Gorgon whose gaze is enough to turn men to stone. Horatia is, therefore, seen by Sir Simon as a dangerous threat to the patriarchal order. His remark: ‘I hope I shall not see her *marble monsters* again’,<sup>126</sup> is met with the reply from his servant, Perkins, that at least art is better than idleness:

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<sup>121</sup> Jonathan David Gross, *The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of a Regency Artist* (Lanham, Maryland and Portsmouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 164.

<sup>122</sup> Hannah Cowley, *The Town Before You, a Comedy* (London: G. Woodfall for T.N. Longman, 1795), Act III, Scene III, p. 51.

<sup>123</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act III, Scene III, p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene II, p. 79.

<sup>125</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene II, p. 79.

<sup>126</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene II, p. 83.

**PERKINS:** Dear Sir, any taste is better than *no* taste, and a lady who employs her thoughts and her chisel on works of art, is, at least, *not idle*; and, therefore, as Doctor Johnson says, not in the way of being wicked.<sup>127</sup>

The concern that idleness leads to wickedness is an idea that Samuel Johnson returns to again and again.<sup>128</sup> However, he was wary of art as a pastime for women. In his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), James Boswell recalls one particular conversation in which Doctor Johnson expressed the opinion that women ought not to take men's likenesses: 'Publick practice of any art, he observed, and staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female.'<sup>129</sup> In *The Town Before You*, art not only fills the time, but is positioned as something more moral than fashionable life, especially when considered in relation to the vortex of idleness and dissipation of the bon-ton. This idea is dramatized in a conversation between Lady Horatia and Lady Charlotte, a society figure who complains that sculpture is 'full of labour'. For Horatia, society is much harder work: 'O! the labour of fashionable life wou'd kill me; I should sink under it. Chipping marble is playing with feathers compared to that.'<sup>130</sup> Horatia elaborates by describing the gamester who has to stay alert lest her friend cheats her, and the society beauty who labours at her toilette only to be outshone by some other belle. Sculpting is preferable to bed-hopping and gambling; as Priscilla Wakefield recommends, poetry, music, painting, and statuary 'may each in succession fill up a leisure opportunity with innocence and usefulness, and become a pleasing antidote to the indolent habit of loitering away time in an unprofitable manner, or what is worse in dissipation'.<sup>131</sup> However, the vices of idleness and dissipation are not necessarily restricted to the rich, and *The Monthly Review* reinforce Cowley's moral message that 'neither fortune, nor the absence of it, produces vice,

<sup>127</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene II, p. 83.

<sup>128</sup> For Samuel Johnson's preoccupation with idleness and its links to vice, see Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

<sup>129</sup> James Boswell, Tuesday 18 April 1775, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Including a Journal of his Tour to the Hebrides*, Vol. III of IV (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1868), p. 127.

<sup>130</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 29.

<sup>131</sup> Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, p. 92.

but that it springs from the want of a due direction to the powers of the mind by early good education and proper habits of life.’<sup>132</sup> In claiming sculpture as one such ‘proper habit’, Cowley combats any immoral associations by removing male nudes from the equation, but in doing so playfully emphasizes the Sapphic associations of sculptural practice.

Cowley tempers the Sapphic atmosphere of the salon with the inclusion of heterosexual suitors, who observe that Horatia only sculpts the female form. However, the joke lies in the ellipsis of Conway’s comment, which implicitly questions whether Horatia only sculpts women to preserve her female modesty or out of same sex desire:

**ASGILL:** I am prepared for all your jests on my passion for a woman who is devoted to sculpture.

**CONWAY:** Faith, I perceive no room for jests. I think it must be charming to see a fine woman sit with a chisel, and bring out of a block of marble, a form as graceful as her own; every feature glowing with animation beneath her eye, and every stroke of the mallet warming the cold mass into mind and expression.

**ASGILL:** I thank you; but your eulogy is not compleat, for the purity of my Horatia chastises the art she loves. The subjects she selects, Delicacy itself would paint out: with an enchanting modesty she seeks for models only in the graces of her own sex, the daughters of Britain, and the matrons of Greece.

**CONWAY:** ‘Very well: but you are a *Son* of Britain --- does Lady Horatia --- <sup>133</sup>

Anne Seymour Damer’s own focus on sculpting busts of some of the country’s most celebrated public figures not only minimized the need for her to study wider human anatomy. If viewing the stony countenances of the great and good can influence the behaviour of the beholder, Damer’s work can be positioned as part of a larger drive for national

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<sup>132</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, p. 331.

<sup>133</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act I, Scene IV, p. 17-18.

improvement.<sup>134</sup> However, Elfenbein observes that Horatia Horton's 'artistic enthusiasms counter the role models of the bourgeois family.'<sup>135</sup>

The defence that Horatia only 'seeks for models in the graces of her own sex' turns out to be a false claim when her projects are revealed to include Ganymede. The unsuitability of Ganymede, Atalanta, and Olympus as models is observed by Sir Simon, who launches into a tirade against 'such vile trash as lads learn out of Ovid'.<sup>136</sup> Whilst the influence of Ovid is lambasted owing to the erotic content of his poetry, the issue of transformation is also central to his works. The Pygmalion myth, for example, is referenced numerous times throughout the play as a means of engaging with the similarities and differences between art and life, as well as with the idea of falling in love with an idealized artistic creation. Given the classical precedent for artists to fall in love with their work, the observation that Horatia only sculpts women can alternately stand for her Sapphic desire, as well as act as a marker of her virtuous conduct.

The insinuation of same-sex desire would not have been lost on an audience familiar with seeing comedies exploiting the misplaced attraction felt by one woman for another disguised in breeches. Drawing upon David Robinson's description of Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre-goers as 'a lesbianly knowing audience',<sup>137</sup> Dawn M. Goode suggests that 'Although the femme believes her desire to be for a man, the audience's knowledge of the female (both character and actress) beneath the breeches undresses the femme's desire as lesbian.'<sup>138</sup> For Goode, 'the femme serves as a threat to an emergent binary gender sexuality system needed to shore up the institution of marriage, which had become

<sup>134</sup> See Susan Walker, *Greek and Roman Portraits* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), for a discussion of public sculpture's power to stand in for figures of authority.

<sup>135</sup> Elfenbein, 'Lesbian Aestheticism on the Eighteenth-Century Stage', p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene II, p. 81.

<sup>137</sup> David Robinson, 'Pleasant Conversation in the Seraglio: Lesbianism, Platonic Love, and Cavendish's Blazing World', *The Eighteenth Century*, 44.2-3 (2003), 133-66 (p. 137).

<sup>138</sup> Dawn M. Goode, "'Under a Petticoat': Excess Femininity and Lesbian Desire on the Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century British Stage', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36.2 (2013), 177-90 (p. 180).

less about political and economic considerations and more about potentially destabilising individual choice.’<sup>139</sup> With the characters of Georgina and Horatia, Cowley replaces the ‘Femme Friend’ and the ‘Breeches Part’ with a Femme Friend and a woman sculptor. This is more dangerously explicit in that same-sex attraction is not simply accounted for as a comedic case of mistaken identity. The phallic chisel is wielded openly, compensating for the ‘female lack’ of the empty breeches. A female protégé expressing the desire to learn from Horatia not only replicates the scene depicted in the caricature *The Damerian Apollo*, but echoes the lesbian sentiment behind Hester Lynch Piozzi’s remark: “Tis a joke in London now to say such a one visits Mrs Damer.’<sup>140</sup> In being taught by Horatia, Georgina could easily be led away from heterosexual life. The play accepts and denies the Sapphic potential of sculpture and sculpting with a nod and a wink. Straddling the line between being an upholder of national virtue and breaking down the traditional, heteronormative woman’s role, Horatia extends the opportunities open for women. With the comedy displaced from the mistaken identity of a cross-dressing woman to the misinterpretation of sculpture, the false connoisseurship of the male gaze is the target of the satire.

The theme of mistaken identities is exploited for comedic effect from the outset, with Conway and Asgill speaking at cross purposes; Asgill lauding Horatia when Conway thinks they are discussing Georgina:

**CONWAY:** Her taste is as fine as other people’s I dare swear; but she will bear a little polish.

**ASGILL:** She bear polish --- ha, ha, ha! where will you find such a mind, such an understanding?<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Goode, ‘Excess Femininity’, p. 179.

<sup>140</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi, 9 December 1795, *Thraliana*, p. 949.

<sup>141</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act I, Scene IV, p. 17.

Sculpture provides the opportunity to play on the idea of forming, shaping, or *polishing* character as well as a means of commenting upon classical education and false connoisseurship.

With art having the power to elicit an honest reaction, Georgina playfully takes posing for Horatia as Andromache as an opportunity to fool her suitor and ‘see what Mr. Conway says to me as a statue’:<sup>142</sup>

**CONWAY:** Heavens! it is---it is she! how well do you represent yourself: for you are yourself all marble; at least your heart is so. Yes, flinty-hearted charmer! you are ever cold and insensate. O! I could stand and gaze my life away, like Pygmalion, had I, like him, the power to warm statue into love! what, will you not bless me with one glance. Ah, you act the part too well.<sup>143</sup>

Georgina’s identity merges with that of the statue to the extent that it is not clear if Conway is at least initially fooled by appearances, or whether he merely plays along, appreciating the joke of Georgina pretending to be a statue given her ‘flinty-hearted’ teasing of him. Georgina has herself remarked upon the pleasing blur between art and artist when admiring Horatia at work: ‘O! Lady Horatia does look so charmingly whilst at her labours; her sweet white hands appear like the very marble she is at work upon.’<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Lady Charlotte cautions Horatia against being too emotional by recommending that she take on the hard-hearted characteristic of her marble: ‘What hearts we possess! Always too cold, or too feeling. My dear Horatia, stonify your’s a little. As you give spirit to marble, transfuse the marble to your heart’.<sup>145</sup> Charlotte’s advice suggests a symbiotic relationship between artist and their art, with opposing characteristics ‘transfused’ from one to the other. Whether a lover is deemed too hard or too emotional, sculpture provides the point of comparison from which to vocalize desires and initiate a transformation.

<sup>142</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 33.

<sup>143</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 32.

<sup>144</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act I, Scene III, p. 13.

<sup>145</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 30.

Playing on the Pygmalion myth and the familiar trope of comparing beautiful women to statues, this comic scene hinges on the scathing critique of Tippy, an imposter posing as a connoisseur, viewing what he mistakenly perceives to be Horatia's work:

**Tippy:** What is this? Is this Lady Horatia's chissel?

**Conway:** No it is by a greater artist.

**Tippy:** An English one, I'll be sworn. Grecian indeed! a mere block-chipper!

**Conway:** Is it ill proportioned?

**Tippy:** Pshaw! nonsense! talk of proportions to scale makers and carpenters; the thought is mechanical! a mere wax doll! where are the inflexions? a human figure made on this principle, could never move.<sup>146</sup>

Georgina lets her guise slip by shrieking as he reaches to touch her foot, leaving Tippy 'done up as a connoisseur'<sup>147</sup> when it is revealed that he has in fact been appraising Georgina as if she were a badly-formed wax doll. Tippy's false claims to connoisseurship position him as the figure to be ridiculed rather than Horatia. However unskilled or eccentric Horatia is believed to be, her reputation is saved by the fact that she is criticized by the likes of Tippy, a false connoisseur, and Sir Simon, a heathen with a decided lack of appreciation for the fine arts and a limited view on the role of women in society. The case of mistaken identity between Georgina and Andromache links Tippy to Sir Simon when Sir Simon is later fooled into thinking that Georgina is actually Horatia, suggesting that his opinion is also not to be valued or given any credence. A woman sculptor may be an outrageous prospect for many, but Horatia is the character with whom the audience sympathize. As Andrew Elfenbein observes, Cowley 'follows the Augustan convention of lending a shade of ridiculousness to a character who is basically meant to be taken seriously so that she can avoid seeming to

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<sup>146</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 33-34.

<sup>147</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act II, Scene IV, p. 35.

preach too crudely to her audience'.<sup>148</sup> Cowley shows that a comic character can still be used to promote women and present a role beyond that of daughter, wife, or mother.

Sir Simon comes around to the prospect of his nephew marrying a sculptor when it is revealed that Horatia does not want Asgill for his fortune, there being 'no value in wealth',<sup>149</sup> but in sharing hers with him. However, Sir Simon does recommend that she set down her chisel once married. *The Monthly Review*, 'Though favourably disposed to Lady *Horatia Horton's* art of sculpture', reported that they were 'not sorry that the author has put the following speech into the mouth of Sir Simon at the end of the piece':<sup>150</sup> 'Come, come Madam, throw away your chisel and our marble blocks, and set about making a good wife. That ART is the noblest pride of an Englishwoman.'<sup>151</sup> As Cowley's last play, it is significant that she chose to end *The Town Before You*, and her career, on this note. Angela Escott interprets Cowley's decision to conclude her dramatic career with a play about a woman artist 'which challenged women's exclusion from the 'republic of taste''<sup>152</sup> as a positive affirmation of her role as writer, wife, and mother. With Cowley having described herself as 'a mother and a 'Painter' in the prologue to her first comedy', Escott believes that 'Her career as a dramatist can thus be seen as a progression towards a self-construction in which Cowley finally resolved her own conflict between the demands of being a writer and the expectations of being a woman and a mother'.<sup>153</sup> Although the play ends without this issue fully resolved, with Sir Simon's advice unanswered, the characterization of him as a 'heathen' suggests that his words will be left unheeded. As for Georgina, her epilogue describes how once a married woman, domestic concerns will become her primary cause for happiness:

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<sup>148</sup> Elfenbein, 'Lesbian Aestheticism on the Eighteenth-Century Stage', p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene IV, p. 91.

<sup>150</sup> Anon, *The Monthly Review*, p. 332.

<sup>151</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Act V, Scene VII, p. 102.

<sup>152</sup> Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 213.

<sup>153</sup> Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 213.

My **Conway**'s temperate joys I'll make my own,  
 And *his* felicity my life shall crown;  
 With *him* through Pleasure's paths I'll sometimes roam,  
 But still my *first enjoyment*, shall be HOME.  
 The Household Gods ten thousand graces wear.  
 Nor stoop to borrow tinsel'd, *foreign* glare---  
 Yet never shall your Household Deities frown,  
 Though you should steal an hour, to see--- **The Town!**<sup>154</sup>

Even though Georgina seems content to subscribe to a heteronormative ideal, she aims to find a happy balance between the comforts of home and the delights of town in her marriage to Conway.

Although *The Town Before You* was to be Cowley's last play, she continued to write poetry and maintained an interest in the thematic potential of sculpture. The poem 'Departed Youth' published in 1813,<sup>155</sup> addresses the power of painting and sculpture to promote the privileged vision of the artist:

As when Youth deck'd my polish'd brow.  
 The Chissel's lightest touch to trace  
 Through the pure form, or soften'd grace,  
 Is lent me still, I still admire,  
 And kindle at the POET'S fire - <sup>156</sup>

Sculpture inspires Cowley's poetry and, importantly, taste in art is not something lost with age. A lasting appreciation of the arts is more valuable than the fleeting charms of youth and beauty.

The problem of relying upon appearances to form an accurate character judgement is prevalent in Anna Maria Porter's novel *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807), in which the comedic character of an aristocratic female sculptor actually displays a level of insight lacked

<sup>154</sup> Cowley, *The Town Before You*, Epilogue, p. 104.

<sup>155</sup> The poem was published in 1813, but written in 1797. Significantly, this was the year her husband died serving in India.

<sup>156</sup> Hannah Cowley, 'Departed Youth', in *The Works of Mrs Cowley*, Vol. III of III (London: Wilkie and Robinson, 1813), pp. 111-12 (p. 112, Lines 20-24).

by other characters. The idea of ‘renouncing Lavater’ is a key theme in the novel as Porter presents a series of characters with different moral and intellectual outlooks despite bearing a physical resemblance. According to Johann Casper Lavater’s influential *Essays on Physiognomy*, first published in England in 1789, a person’s character is connected with their external features: ‘So intimate is their correspondence that the expression of the countenance, more rapid than speech, betrays his sentiments and emotions.’<sup>157</sup> However, for Porter, identity is not fixed by physical appearance. Challenging the reading of moral perfection in physical perfection, as seen in Emily’s appraisal of Belmour in Damer’s novel, Porter’s message in *The Hungarian Brothers* is not to be misled by beauty or physical resemblances.

### **The Rejection of Lavater in *The Hungarian Brothers***

Anna Maria Porter is most often cited in reference to her sister, and fellow novelist, Jane. As noted by Devoney Looser: ‘the Porters’ contemporaries often referenced them in one breath. In this way, the ‘Misses Porter’ experienced on an individual level (or rather dual level) what women writers as a group faced during this period – the phenomenon of being lumped together, to be handled en masse.’<sup>158</sup> *The Hungarian Brothers*, often compared to Jane Porter’s *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), similarly unites the masculine and feminine realms in its treatment of military and domestic concerns. *The Annual Review* noted the similarity by comparing Anna Maria Porter’s work favourably to that of her sister: ‘The “Hungarian Brothers” of this lady make their appearance before the British public as no unworthy companions to the noble and admired “Thaddeus” of her sister.’<sup>159</sup> Charles and Demetrius,

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<sup>157</sup> J.C. Lavater, *The Pocket Lavater, Or, The Science of Physiognomy* (New York: Van Winkle & Wiley, 1817), p. 13.

<sup>158</sup> Devoney Looser, ‘The Porter Sisters, Women’s Writing, and Historical Fiction’, in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1750-1830*, ed. by Jacqueline M. Labbe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), pp. 233-53 (p. 238).

<sup>159</sup> Anon, ‘ART. V. *The Hungarian Brothers*’, *The Annual Review and History of Literature for 1808*, Vol. VII (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1809), p. 603.

the Hungarian brothers of the title, embark on military careers following the loss of their inheritance to their dissolute father's gambling debts and are presented as the model of honourable military masculinity: 'they might have been taken for models of moral and material beauty: they were indeed perfect specimens of the loveliness of youth, and the magnificence of manhood.'<sup>160</sup> The reference to 'models' here uses sculptural practice to show that they have the ideal form from which to take an allegorical representation.

Had Anna Maria chosen to pursue another of her talents, she could have become an artist of renown, mentioned alongside the likes of Anne Seymour Damer and Angelica Kauffman. The obituary for Porter to appear in *The Gentleman's Magazine* not only charts the development of her precocious talent as a writer, but emphasizes her natural disposition for the arts, particularly model-making:

Such was her skill in this department - such the delight with which she devoted herself to the attractive pursuit - that, finding it likely to divert her attention from studies which she considered it her duty to cultivate, she, by an act of no slight self-denial, abandoned the art.<sup>161</sup>

Although the writer suggests that Porter possessed great skill, sculpture did not have the same appeal as her literary studies, which had the capacity to awaken the emotions and provide 'lessons of filial duty'<sup>162</sup> for the young. Porter evidently felt a need to make a choice and focus her attention upon her particular vocation, similar to that depicted by Angelica Kauffman in her *Self-Portrait of the Artist Hesitating Between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1791). Porter abandoned the visual arts whilst still only a teenager so that she could devote herself to writing, publishing *Artless Tales* (1793) with a frontispiece designed by her brother. Porter and her equally talented siblings grew up surrounded by an eminent circle of

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<sup>160</sup> Anna Maria Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. I of III (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), p.16.

<sup>161</sup> Anon [L.S.S], 'Obituary – Miss Anna Maria Porter', *The Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronical*, Vol. CII: July-December 1832 (London: Printed by J.B. Nichols and Son, 1832), pp. 574-78 (p. 576).

<sup>162</sup> Anon, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, p. 577.

family friends, including Sir Walter Scott and James Northcote R.A., whose conversation fostered intellectual curiosity. The obituary particularly emphasizes the significance of art as a path not chosen through the physical comparisons made between Porter and the artists Joshua Reynolds and Angelica Kauffman:

In these proofs of corresponding genius, a physiognomist might have traced the marks of kindred minds; for, when Anna Maria was scarcely more than a child, her features were thought to resemble those of Sir Joshua Reynolds; and, to render the portrait complete, the friend who discovered the likeness, used to be fond of placing a pair of spectacles on her nose. When a few years more advanced in life, persons who had known Angelica Kauffmann in her youth, found in Anna Maria Porter a similar resemblance to that celebrated woman.<sup>163</sup>

Although physiognomy supposedly marks Porter out as pre-disposed to the arts, she has the educational opportunities to choose a literary career. However, sculpture also remains an interest given that aside from numerous comparisons to classical works of sculpture, the novel features an aristocratic sculptor named Baroness Ingersdorf.

As ‘a votary of the fine arts’, the assemblies Baroness Ingersdorf hosts at her home bring together those who have distinguished themselves in the arts and sciences; here ‘reason and decorum always guided the unsteady steps of pleasure’.<sup>164</sup> Charles’s physical beauty and artistic talent makes him a welcome addition to the Baroness’s circle of friends, and he is one of the few permitted access to the inner sanctum of her work-room:

The Baroness Ingersdorf was a passionate admirer of the arts; and her mornings were usually passed in a magnificent saloon, denominated her work-room, to which she admitted only select friends, while she piled the modelling-sticks, or the chissel, with equal vileness.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Anon. *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, p. 576.

<sup>164</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 32.

<sup>165</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 96.

The value judgements placed upon her work, filtered through the narratorial voice, position the Baroness as a comic figure, whose artistic efforts are to be laughed at. However, she is not merely a figure used to mock female artistic endeavour.

The preface to the novel outlines Porter's anxieties regarding the reception of the characters she presents, stating that the 'strong painting' may appear unnatural exaggeration:

She feared, that the foreign manners exhibited in these pages, differing so widely from those of England, might, at first sight, be mistaken for a dereliction from nature; and that strong painting of some of the characters, to many of her readers, might appear inappropriate and preposterous. – But all who have travelled over the Continent, must recollect the animated salutations which pass between relations and friends of either sex.<sup>166</sup>

The 'strong painting' is not intended to promote a verbal caricature, exaggerated for comic effect, but a realistic character portrait. The Baroness's eccentricities, including her sculptural practice and overfamiliarity, are presented as the quirks of a foreigner; familiar yet other. The narrator goes on to apologise for the Baroness's indelicate comments on male beauty with the justification that: 'It is notorious, that a female artist speaks to a man of his person with the greatest freedom: the Baroness therefore had assured Charles a thousand times, that he had indisputably "The finest head in the world".'<sup>167</sup> Baroness Ingersdorf lacks sustained character development in that there is no discussion of her motivation as a sculptor; whether she considers her work as an amusing hobby or whether she has grander ambitions in breaking-down societal expectations. However, the episodes in her work-room do reveal her knowledge and insight, if not her talent.

Upon closer inspection, it is revealed that the Baroness possesses taste, connoisseurship, and sound character judgement, even if her skill in rendering likenesses in marble requires honing:

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<sup>166</sup> Porter, 'Preface' to *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. vii.

<sup>167</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 97.

Nothing could be more surprising, than to see her there, surrounded by antique statues of infinite beauty; to hear her descant upon proportion, grace, expression, form; to observe her judging accurately of others performances, even at the same time in which she was shaping some hideous mass, out of clay or marble, calling it a bust, and looking at it with exultation.<sup>168</sup>

Although she is mocked for her attempts, the Baroness ‘sees’ true characters, viewing Charles as an Apollo of the arts and aligning him with heroes, gods, and warriors in a way which foreshadows the events of the novel: ‘she had modelled his bust, alternately for an Apollo, a Scipio, a Cyrus; and was now condemning him again to fresh torture, having discovered that he, his brother, and her niece, would make a glorious groupe of Hector, Andromache, and Paris’.<sup>169</sup> In casting Charles and her niece, Adelaide, as Hector and Andromache she hints at their suitability as a couple, whilst positioning Demetrius as Hector’s brother, Paris, shows that she recognizes his more dissolute characteristics, as Demetrius will go on to abscond with a married woman in an episode mirroring the abduction of Helen of Troy. Whilst the classical figures do not entirely capture the character of each sitter, they are aligned. However, there remains a gap between appearance and reality. True beauty requires internal goodness and Charles’s love for Adelaide only develops with knowledge of her virtuous character. This is a lesson Demetrius needs to learn.

Charles does have a very different temperament to that of his more impetuous, Romantic younger brother; Porter contrasting siblings in the same manner as Jane Austen does in *Sense and Sensibility*. Blinded by beauty, Demetrius is quick to form judgements based on aesthetic appreciation before he really knows anything of a woman’s character: ‘Demetrius thought every pretty woman faultless’.<sup>170</sup> He channels his intense emotional responses to natural and physical beauty into poetry: ‘A talent for poetry gave Demetrius an

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<sup>168</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 96.

<sup>169</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 97.

<sup>170</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 40.

acute relish for whatever was beautiful, either in animate, or inanimate nature; and so coupled were the ideas of moral and physical perfection, in his visionary fancy, that he could never separate them'.<sup>171</sup> In contrast, a talent for drawing bestows his brother Charles with analytical attention to detail: 'Charles, on the contrary, distinctly perceived every grace, and every deficiency; his genius for drawing gave him a habit of accurate observation'.<sup>172</sup> His dedication to his profession as a soldier and his studies means that Charles has not only distinguished himself on the battlefield, but is refined company at assemblies. Charles, therefore, embodies Castiglione's *Courtier* in that he is able to use his artistic skill to draw accurate maps and strategic battle plans, but can also turn to his talent as a pleasing amusement when amongst female company: 'relieving his severer pursuits, by music and drawing'.<sup>173</sup> Drawing together does successfully nurture the budding relationship between Charles and Adelaide, whereas the passionate and impulsive Demetrius duly falls in love with his counterpart, Madame de Fontainville: a captivating woman who 'had a sensibility so tender as to become infectious'.<sup>174</sup> Such 'infectious' sensibility is dangerous for them both given that she is a married woman. In this case, sharing the same temperament fosters an unhealthy dependency fuelled by excess sensibility.

At heart, Madame de Fontainville is innocent but in need of guidance: 'Without a friend to direct it, the very amiableness of Madame de Fontainville's nature led her into error'.<sup>175</sup> Lacking the rational education of heroines such as Emily in *Belmour*, she only knows how to captivate through accomplishment, a trait Porter positions as a product of her education in 'the dissolute court of France'.<sup>176</sup> Madame de Fontainville has been taught to

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<sup>171</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 40

<sup>172</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 40.

<sup>173</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 12.

<sup>174</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, p. 166.

<sup>175</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* p. 166.

<sup>176</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* p. 166.

please using her beauty and ‘talents for every art which captivates the taste or the senses’,<sup>177</sup> making her irresistible to the opposite sex. Demetrius is horrified when Charles suggests that Madame de Fontainville resembles the celebrated opera singer, Signora Albertina: ““And this profligate wretch is like Madame de Fontainville!” exclaimed Demetrius indignantly: “impossible, Charles!””<sup>178</sup> The unfavourable comparison leads Demetrius to proclaim: “I renounce Lavater”.<sup>179</sup> Noticing the physical likeness between people with similar personality traits, Lavater’s theory that knowledge of a person’s internal, moral life is discernible from their external features was in large part developed from his artistic practice of sketching portraits of his friends.<sup>180</sup> Adopting a position which allows for the combined effects of nature and nurture, Lavater suggests that a person’s appearance is subject to the influence of the mother’s thoughts whilst the baby is in the womb, as well as marks and changes through life which occur through muscle usage. A sweet-natured person who smiles a lot will look different to someone whose anger causes them to frown: ‘shall not therefore an angry mind and protuberant muscles be considered as cause and effect?’<sup>181</sup> The artist is thus attuned to assess character, not just mark shapes. However, acts are more important than appearance in Porter’s work. Although both women are aware of the seductive power of the arts, Porter challenges a physiognomical reading in that the loud, argumentative, and openly predatory Signora Albertina differs from Madame de Fontainville who, rather than being pre-disposed to court public display and pursue adulterous relationships, has been led astray by her ineffectual education. The very reliability of resemblance is further called into question given that similarity is seen as something dependent upon the eye of the beholder. For example, Princess Constantia, who is in love with Demetrius, perceives his likeness in the countenance

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<sup>177</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* pp. 165-66.

<sup>178</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* p. 146.

<sup>179</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers* p. 146.

<sup>180</sup> J.C. Lavater, *Physiognomy; Or, The Corresponding Analogy Between the Conformation of the Features and the Ruling Passions of the Mind* (London: Cowie, Low and Co., 1826), p. 23.

<sup>181</sup> Lavater, *Physiognomy*, p. 4.

of a young cousin she cares for when no likeness would be seen by anyone else. This is because Porter proposes that ‘we are apt to think those objects strictly alike, which produce in us the same emotions’.<sup>182</sup>

Where the physical similarity between Madame de Fontainville and Signora Albertini is highlighted, contrast is later drawn between Madame and the Princess Constantia to point out the superiority of the Princess:

How often during the reign of his wild infatuation had he turned impatiently from the praises of this very Constantia; whose character both Charles and Baron Ingersdorf took pleasure in covertly opposing to that of Madame de Fontainville! How often had he vowed almost to hate her!<sup>183</sup>

When they do finally meet, as Demetrius gallantly saves Constantia from a fire, he falls in love with her. The difference he perceives between the two women is expressed through allusion to statuary:

The latter was like an alabaster copy of “that beauteous statue which enchants the world”, animated into motion, and breathing only love: while the person of the other seemed but the spiritualised dress of an ethereal nature, through every part of which the living principle glowed vividly.<sup>184</sup>

The ideal standard of beauty may be represented by classical statuary, but this is a poor substitute for nature, making the statuesque Madame de Fontainville a mere copy of a copy. In contrast, Constantia is the very spirit of nature. Madame may be beautiful, but she lacks vitality. With the blood draining from her sallow cheeks as she weakens, her skin comes to resemble hard, white alabaster. Like Gallatea, she needs the love of Demetrius, her Pygmalion, in order to come to life; without him she will die:

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<sup>182</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, Vol. III, p. 67.

<sup>183</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, Vol. II, p. 126.

<sup>184</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, Vol. II, p. 125. The ‘beauteous statue’ described is the Venus de Medici, with Porter quoting ‘Summer’ (1727) from James Thomson’s ‘The Seasons’ here.

Where was that beauty which seemed capable of defying time and decay? Under the grasp of death it hath withered. No crimson blood now flowed through the finely-rounded and smiling lips; no sparkling fluid floated over the rayless eyes; that skin, which once dazzled with animated whiteness, was turned to lifeless marble; and the shape which a statuary might have selected for a Phryne was wasted nearly away.<sup>185</sup>

Akin to the Pygmalion myth in reverse, this description of Madame de Fontainville shows how too close a resemblance to statuary is undesirable. Whilst a statue can represent ideal beauty that will not wither, her transformation renders her lifeless marble. Once again, classical knowledge reveals similarity in character, with Phryne being a Greek courtesan who was tried for impiety. As the lover of the sculptor Praxiteles, she was used as a model for Aphrodite of Knidos, famed as the first nude statue of a woman from ancient Greece. Significantly, Madame de Fontainville has also sat for the Baroness's bust of Cleopatra, hinting at a tragic downfall.

Porter may privilege life over art, but the artist is pre-disposed to be a good judge of character. Where Demetrius has a poet's mind, meaning that his imagination serves to complete a picture of beauty without first getting to know his subject, Charles will not rely upon surface beauty as a marker of internal virtue. Furthermore, even if the Baroness does lack skill as a sculptor, she still demonstrates classical knowledge and character insight in her choice to sculpt Demetrius as Paris and his lover, if not as beautiful Helen, as a sexually alluring Cleopatra.

## Conclusions

As a European with an interest in sculpture, the Baroness Ingersdorf perhaps has more directly in common with Caroline of Brunswick than Ann Seymour Damer, but Porter's use of an aristocratic sculptor of questionable skill recalls Lady Horatia Horton in Cowley's *The*

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<sup>185</sup> Porter, *The Hungarian Brothers*, Vol. III, p. 87.

*Town Before You*. However, the harmonious domestic circle surrounding the Baroness is decidedly heteronormative. On the one hand, it could be argued that this makes the practice of sculpture more acceptable, but it should be noted that here the eccentric woman sculptor is still ‘othered’, with the comedy displaced from her sexuality to her nationality. Sculpture does at least allow for women to live an unconventional lifestyle, even if aristocratic privilege is needed to do so.

Aristocratic privilege was not something enjoyed by Anna Maria Porter, who needed to write to earn a living. In spite of their literary successes, society connections, and respectable background, the Porter sisters continued to live in a state of genteel poverty owing to the need to support their family, including their debt-ridden brothers. Nevertheless, Jane Porter was cited as ‘a woman once ‘celebrated’ all over the known world; yet who drew her happiness from the lovingness of home and friends, while her life was as pure as her renown was extensive.’ Mrs S.C. Hall’s ‘Memories of Miss Jane Porter’ focuses on the more serious and diligently thoughtful of the pair, the author knowing ‘personally but very little’ of Anna Maria,<sup>186</sup> but the message is the same for all women writers:

‘Celebrity’ rarely adds to the happiness of a woman, and almost as rarely increases her usefulness. The time and attention required to attain ‘celebrity’ must; except under very peculiar circumstances, interfere with the feminine duties upon which the well-doing of society depends, and which shed so pure a halo around our English homes.<sup>187</sup>

Alongside Jane Porter, the writers Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Maria Jane Jewsbury, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.) are singled out for praise. Whilst Hall claims to be proud of those women writers whose work has improved society and whose ‘well balanced minds’ have enabled them to combine literary life and home life, she remains resolute in her belief that ‘the *woman* would have been happier had she continued enshrined

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<sup>186</sup> Mrs. S.C. Hall, ‘Memories of Miss Jane Porter’, *The Art Journal* (London, July 1850), pp. 221-23 (p. 222).

<sup>187</sup> Hall, ‘Memories of Miss Jane Porter’, p. 221.

in the privacy of domestic love and domestic duty'.<sup>188</sup> The recommendation that women would be better off at home rather than pursuing fame is reflected in the quotation from Madame de Staël which Hall includes as a footnote to the piece.

I was set on a stage, at a child's age, to be listened to as a wit and worshipped for my premature judgement. I drank adulation as my soul's nourishment, *and I cannot now live without its poison; it has been my bane*, never an aliment. My heart ever sighed for happiness, and I ever lost it, when I thought it approaching my grasp. I was admired, made an idol, *but never beloved*.<sup>189</sup>

De Staël's regrets were supposedly expressed directly to the Porters as a means of praising their upbringing in contrast with her own childhood experiences. Devoney Looser has suggested that Anna Maria Porter, for one, agreed that the public and private life of a woman were irreconcilable, citing the following letter in which the writer advises a friend that a life in the public eye is only to be entered into at the sacrifice of domestic happiness:

From the first time I published, money was my object—support for myself and others dearer to me than self—Fame certainly had its power graces in my young eyes for the first few years—but I soon learned that woman's public fame is the death blow to her private happiness.<sup>190</sup>

The more successful a woman becomes, the higher the reaches of Mount Parnassus she scales, the less likely she is to attract a husband and set-down domestic roots. Neither of the two Porter sisters married; their piety combined with their modest domestic situation protecting their reputation. However, the idea that work and marriage are incompatible can, in itself, account for the accusations of Sapphism levelled against women artists such as Anne Seymour Damer.

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<sup>188</sup> Hall, 'Memories of Miss Jane Porter', p. 221.

<sup>189</sup> Hall, 'Memories of Miss Jane Porter', p. 221.

<sup>190</sup> Anna Maria Porter, Letter to Elizabeth Dillon, 21 May 1824, Jane Porter Papers, Huntington Library, POR 218. See Devoney Looser, Interview for the *What's Her Name* podcast [online]: <https://www.whatshernamepodcast.com/jane-and-anna-maria-porter/> [accessed 02/04/2018]

Whilst the term ‘Sapphic’ was used as a homophobic slur against Damer, the association with Sappho can be reclaimed. As an aristocratic woman of great skill who loved women, Damer can be positively aligned with the poet, Sappho. Although a great deal of uncertainty surrounds Sappho’s life, the prolific Greek poet was born into a wealthy family on the island of Lesbos, with the terms lesbian and Sapphic deriving from her name and place of birth testament to the fact that she is remembered as much for her sexuality as her work. It has been suggested that there were two Sapphos to account for the difficulty in reconciling the idea that a woman could be both a highly skilled poet and sexually active. This theory dates from at least 200 AD, when Aelian wrote in his *Historical Miscellanies*: ‘I understand that there was in Lesbos another Sappho, a courtesan, not a poetess.’<sup>191</sup> Another later, and most likely fictional, story of Sappho’s love for the ferryman, Phaon, whose rejection leads to her suicide, can be read as an attempt to retrospectively ‘heterosexualize’ Sappho. However, whether she is cast as heterosexual, homosexual, or a-sexual, artistic production is never truly separated from sexuality. As this chapter has demonstrated, the characterization of an artist is always dependent upon ideas of gender, class, nationality, and sexuality. Characterized as the ‘Tenth Muse’, Sappho’s high status as a poet is confirmed by her inclusion in Raphael’s fresco of Parnassus, in which she occupies a unique position, separated from both the Muses and the male poets they inspire. Gill Perry’s study of Mary Robinson’s guise as ‘The British Sappho’ sees this naming strategy as a means to dignify her status from that of an actress, as infamous for her role as Perdita in *The Winter’s Tale* as for being the mistress of the Prince of Wales, to be taken seriously as a poet. Allusion to Sappho is different to that of a Muse in that she is a historical figure rather than mythical precedent: ‘Her status as Sappho gives a specific and *active* meaning to the collective status as one of the Muses.’<sup>192</sup> Positioning Anne

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<sup>191</sup> Aelian, *Historical Miscellanies*, Test. 4, quoted in Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion*, p. 74.

<sup>192</sup> Gill Perry, ‘The British Sappho’: Borrowed Identities and the Representation of Women Artists in Late Eighteenth-Century British Art’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 18.1 (1995), 44-57 (p. 48).

Seymour Damer as the ‘Sappho of Sculpture’, therefore, can work to celebrate her achievements whilst placing her as a worthy benefactor in an unbroken chain of queer matrilineal inheritance.<sup>193</sup>

Madame de Staël’s novel *Corinne* is one text to engage with the figure of a heterosexual Sappho, as the artist heroine, a revered improvisational poet, struggles to live once forsaken by her male lover. The focus upon a tragic, heterosexual relationship is inspired by what Clorinda Donato describes as Alessandro Verri’s ‘unqueered’ depiction of Sappho in *Le Avventure di Saffo, Poetessa di Mitelene* (1782): ‘Verri’s characterisation of Sappho as a respected woman of letters rather than a depraved lover of other women operates as an implicit defence of the status of women in the Republic of Italian and European letters.’<sup>194</sup> According to Donato, Verri ‘restores a positive connotation to the term Sapphic as the descriptor of the woman who writes poetry.’<sup>195</sup> However, the difficulty a woman experiences in trying to reconcile fame and family life remains prevalent. The next chapter will address this issue in relation to the Corinne myth by using British responses to Madame de Staël’s novel to evaluate how writers including Maria Jane Jewsbury, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon negotiate the path of personal fame and private happiness in their work. The question of nation will once again come back to the fore, as these writers challenge the notion of whether a British woman can be an artist.

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<sup>193</sup> Working within an oral tradition, Sappho is often described as a teacher, who would instruct groups of young girls to sing her lyric poems, This creates a female chain of influence, as does the fact that later women poets would characterize themselves as followers of Sappho.

<sup>194</sup> Clorinda Donato, ‘Unqueering and Effeminizing the Author in Early Modern Italy: Alessandro Verri’s *Le Avventure di Saffo, Poetessa di Mitelene* and the Defense of Women Poets in Arcadia’, in *Developments in the Histories of Sexualities: In Search of the Normal, 1600-1800*, ed. by C. Mounsey (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), pp. 92-116 (p. 92).

<sup>195</sup> Donato, ‘Unqueering and Effeminizing the Author in Early Modern Italy’, p. 95.

## Chapter Five

### The Corinne Effect: Germaine de Staël's Influence on the British Woman as an Artist

Radiant daughter of the sun!  
Now thy living wreath is won.  
Crown'd of Rome! – Oh! Art thou not  
Happy in that glorious lot?

Felicia Hemans, 'Corinne at the Capitol' (1827)<sup>1</sup>

Remember my verses sometimes, for my soul is stamped on them.

Germaine de Staël, *Corinne* (1807)<sup>2</sup>

Since its publication in 1807, Germaine de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* has influenced the work of writers including Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Brontës, and George Eliot, to name but a few. The 'Corinne Effect' has not only seen women writers inspired to find their own voice, but has had a profound and lasting effect upon the characterization of women artists in poetry and prose fiction. The heroine's final plea for her verses to be remembered sometimes has left a resounding echo despite displaying concern with the ephemeral nature of women's work. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was compelled to describe *Corinne* as 'an immortal book', proclaiming that it 'deserves to be read three score and ten times – that is once every year in the age of man.'<sup>3</sup> This chapter will engage with the early British responses to *Corinne* by analysing Mrs E.M. Foster's parody, *The Corinna of England* (1809), and Maria Jane Jewsbury's novella, 'The History of an Enthusiast' (1830), alongside the poetry of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon

<sup>1</sup> Felicia Hemans, 'Corinne at the Capitol', in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), pp.355-57 (p. 357, Lines 41-44). First published as 'Corinna at the Capitol' in *The Literary Souvenir* (1827, pp. 189-91).

<sup>2</sup> Madame de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. by Sylvia Raphael (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Hugh Stuart Boyd, 9 June 1832, Letter 453, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, Vol. III (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 2010), pp. 25-27 (p. 25), [online]: <<https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/516/?rsId=188174&returnPage=1>>[accessed 20/04/20]

(L.E.L.), in order to address the possibility of how an Italian figure such as Corinne could fit into British society.

As its alternate subtitle suggests, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) is a novel as much about Italy, its art and national character, as it is a tragic love story. Corinne *is* Italy and de Staël's work has the two-fold aim of presenting her views on national character and the place of an artistic woman in society through the vehicle of a romance plot. Reviewers were quick to temper their praise of de Staël's work with the condemnation that the heroine's free and independent behaviour would not be acceptable in Britain, although *The Annual Review* conceded that it 'would be deemed perfectly irreproachable in the softer climate of Italy.'<sup>4</sup> By way of response, *Le Beau Monde* called for an English Corinne, in the hope that de Staël would 'give us one of her own accomplished and fascinating heroines, in English customs, and with English virtues, and English morality.'<sup>5</sup> In *The Corinna of England* Foster takes on this challenge to comically reveal the difficulty and danger, if not impossibility, of emulating Corinne.

*Corinne* tells the tragic love story of a woman who leaves the restrictions of England behind her in order to pursue an independent life as a poet in Italy. Despite being celebrated as a poet, she is deemed an unsuitable marriage prospect, suggesting that it is impossible for a woman artist to reconcile the competing demands of her public work and private life. Critiquing the limitations imposed upon women, *Corinne* can be read as a dangerous threat to the prescribed order; a cry for intellectual freedom from within the confines of patriarchal society. With Madelyn Gutwirth positioning de Staël's heroine as 'a political and aesthetic

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<sup>4</sup> Anon, 'ART. VII. *Corinne, or Italy*', *The Annual Review; and History of Literature*, ed. by Authur Aikin, Vol. 6: January 1807 (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), pp. 670-76 (p. 673).

<sup>5</sup> Anon, '*Corinne, or Italy*', *Le Beau Monde; Or, Literary and Fashionable Magazine*, Vol. 2, Issue 12: September 1807 (London: J.B. Bell and Co., 1807), pp. 90-92 (p. 92).

embodiment of freedom',<sup>6</sup> identification with Corinne is a revolutionary act. An artist heroine is, by her nature, a political heroine. In the wake of *Literary Women* (1976), many critics, including Gutwirth, have sought to counter Ellen Moers's claim that 'the novel is not, in any polemical sense, a feminist work.'<sup>7</sup> Gutwirth critiques Moers's overreliance on misogynist biographies, contending that her argument 'lacks the context of women's loss of legal and social status pursuant to the French Revolution.'<sup>8</sup> The work of a woman artist raises 'the woman question' in terms of what is possible or acceptable for a woman to achieve whilst functioning within the bounds of societal norms. The pre-chapter epigraph taken from Felicia Hemans's 'Corinne at the Capitol' (1827) raises this very issue by questioning whether professional success is worth anything if domestic happiness has to be sacrificed for a literary career.

Following a contextualizing discussion of the critical response to *Corinne* and the reputation of Madame de Staël, two parodic British responses, namely: *The Corinna of England* and 'The History of an Enthusiast', will be analysed as examples of the negative consequences of women emulating Corinne, before turning to the poetic responses from Landon and Hemans. Landon's 'The Improvisatrice' (1824), and Hemans's 'Corinne at the Capitol' and 'Properzia Rossi' (1828) illustrate how repeated reference to an antecedent, whether that be a poet like Corinne or Sappho, or a woman artist such as Properzia De' Rossi, ensures the remembrance of talented yet abandoned women, whilst also working to drive social change. With Corinne herself an improvisatrice, or improvisational poet, it will be argued that poetry provides a more suitable medium than prose for women writers to fully embody and engage with the Corinne myth.

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<sup>6</sup> Madelyn Gutwirth, 'Seeing Corinne Afresh', in *The Novel's Seductions: Stael's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. by Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1999), pp. 26-33 (p. 26).

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Madelyn Gutwirth, 'Taking Corinne Seriously: a Comment on Ellen Moers's *Literary Women*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 25.3 (2000), 895-99 (p. 897).

Identifying an aesthetic of replication and change at play, Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet suggest that the likes of Jewsbury, Landon, Hemans, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning use *Corinne* to ‘follow the model and give it new life in their own ways.’<sup>9</sup> The call and response between novel writers, artists, and poets promotes the sister arts ideal whilst critically engaging with the *ut pictura poesis* tradition by addressing the limitations of each form.<sup>10</sup> Rather than simply emulating a model whereby the artist heroine is doomed to death and despair, destined never to experience domestic bliss for the sake of fame, the continued replication of the *Corinne* myth works to readdress the problematic status of the woman artist, culminating in the reconciliation between professional and private life found in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

### **Exceptional Women: Madame de Staël as a Corinne Figure**

*Corinne* is often seen as a veiled portrait of Madame de Staël, especially given that the author was painted by Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun as her famous heroine. The *Portrait of Madame de Staël as Corinne on Cape Misenum* (1809), depicts the subject suspended at the point of poetic composition; lyre in hand, her eyes cast up to the heavens, poised to channel divine inspiration. Mary D. Sheriff’s research into de Staël’s self-image reveals the author’s initial reluctance to be depicted as her heroine, evinced by quoting a letter to Henri Meiser, dated 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1807: ‘I do not know if I would dare have myself painted as Corinne by her, but

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet, ‘*Corinne* and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning’, in *The Novel’s Seductions: Stael’s Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. by Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1999), pp. 204-20 (p. 220).

<sup>10</sup> Literally translating to ‘as is painting so is poetry’, the Latin phrase *ut pictura poesis* is used by Horace in his ‘*Ars Poetica*’ (c. 19 BCE) to argue that poetry deserves the same intellectual status as painting, but is often taken out of context as a metaphorical comparison of the arts. However, four centuries earlier Simonides of Keos had stated that ‘painting is silent poetry and poetry, painting that speaks’, the metaphorical comparison here inviting debate on the similarities and limitations of each art form, as found in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766).

Madame Récamier would be a charming model.’<sup>11</sup> The pose, therefore, was likely to have been at the encouragement, if not the suggestion, of the artist. De Staël’s reservation may not have been a concern with her appearance so much as the issue of a woman’s work being bound to her personal experience. As Sheriff notes: ‘Allegorical portraits engaged a play of resemblance and difference in which the sitter was and was not merged with the fictive identity.’<sup>12</sup>



Figure 5.1: Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Portrait of Madame de Staël as Corinne on Cape Misenum* (1808-9), Musée d’Art et d’Histoire de Genève, Accession No. 1841-0003 (Wikimedia Commons).

<sup>11</sup> Germaine de Staël, *Lettres Inédites de Mme de Staël à Henri Meister*, ed. by Paul Ustéri and Eugène Ritter (Paris: Hachette, 1903), p. 193, quoted by Mary D. Sheriff, ‘The Many Faces of Germaine de Staël’, in *Staël’s Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society and the Sister Arts*, ed. by Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisbury, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), pp. 165-96 (p. 180).

<sup>12</sup> Mary D. Sheriff, ‘The Many Faces of Germaine de Staël’, *Staël’s Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society and the Sister Arts*, ed. by Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), pp. 165-96 (p. 181).

With Vigée Le Brun opting not to idealize her sitter, the difference was noted by viewers who found de Staël's beauty lacking. In spite of this, the association between author and subject has stuck, with biographies of de Staël frequently emphasizing the link. The biographical entry included in *Mrs. Hemans' Young Woman's Companion* (1840), for example, is full of praise for the writer's exceptional, precocious talent, noting that Corinne 'is a picture, almost confessedly, of Madame de Staël.'<sup>13</sup> Although this idea may have attracted curious readers, *Corinne* is more than a fictionalized scandal memoir, and the problem of an artist or writer being embodied by their work is an issue explored in *Corinne* which I will discuss later on in this chapter in reference to the figure of the woman poet.

Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein was born in Paris to Swiss parents in 1766. Her father, Jacques Necker, was to become Louis XVI's Director-General of Finance in 1776, whilst her mother, Suzanne Curchod, presided over one of the city's most popular salons. Educated according to Rousseauian principles, as advocated for young boys in *Emile*, de Staël was expected to participate in the lively discussion of her mother's salon from an early age. According to Gutwirth, 'without this immersion in the salon, there would have been no Mme de Staël. The audacity of such permissiveness paid enormous dividends in the daughter's sense of competence within society, an absolute anomaly for a woman in her time.'<sup>14</sup> However, such 'severe study' from an early age had supposedly 'threatened to injure her health.'<sup>15</sup>

Having been raised to be an independent thinker, de Staël was particularly well-versed in politics, but her own writing was simultaneously encouraged and discouraged; her

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<sup>13</sup> [Mrs Hemans], *Mrs. Hemans' Young Woman's Companion* (London: George Virtue, 1840), p. 89. This text was published after Felicia Hemans's death, but shows Virtue using the name 'Mrs. Hemans' as a marketing ploy to play upon her reputation.

<sup>14</sup> Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Anon, *Fifty Famous Women: Their Virtues and Failings, and the Lessons of their Lives* (London: Ward and Lock, 1864), p. 146.

mother had abandoned any pretensions to authorship following her own marriage, whilst Necker, an otherwise loving father, openly mocked his daughter's early writings.<sup>16</sup> Avriel H. Goldberger cites the combination of de Staël's Swiss origins and French upbringing as a reason why 'her compatriots were reluctant to accept her'.<sup>17</sup> De Staël's status as an exceptional woman only increased this sense of reluctance, Goldberger noting the 'malaise generated by the disquieting presence of a unique woman whose every gesture and word seemed to call into question the world of things-as-they-are'.<sup>18</sup> The question of national identity and the place of women in society are key themes of her work which come together in *Corinne* with its talented heroine of dual British and Italian heritage, as well as in her earlier treatise *On Literature* (1800).

Published in 1800, Madame de Staël's *On Literature* sets out her thoughts regarding the relationship between literature and society. De Staël accounts for the differences between Northern and Southern literature by climate; the cold and gloom of the north fostering melancholic introspection, as opposed to the heated passions of the south. Furthermore, she suggests that literary output is a product of a country's institutions, with the observation that the powers of church and state influence literature giving her the opportunity to voice her views on the state of Napoleonic France. Published the year Napoleon became First Consul, it had become clear that he would not work to restore the ideals of the revolution so she set about describing the 'barbarism' of post-revolutionary France: 'In the long run this revolution may enlighten a greater mass of men; but the vulgarity of language, manners, and opinion will make taste and reason lose ground in many ways for some years.'<sup>19</sup> As infamously observed by Madame de Chastenay in 1814: 'there are three great powers struggling against

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<sup>16</sup> Avriel H. Goldberger, 'Introduction' to *Delphine* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. xix.

<sup>17</sup> Goldberger, 'Introduction' to *Delphine*, p. xviii.

<sup>18</sup> Goldberger, 'Introduction' to *Delphine*, p. xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Madame de Staël, 'On Literature Considered in its Relationship to Social Institutions', in *An Extraordinary Woman: Selected Writings of Germaine de Staël*, trans. by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 172-208 (p. 186).

Napoleon for the soul of Europe: England, Russia, and Madame de Staël'.<sup>20</sup> De Staël's own salon attracted, and was open to, diverse political allegiances although she herself advocated a constitutional monarchy of the British model as a moderate means of regulating power. Personal and political freedom was important to her, angering Napoleon who is reputed to have said that she 'teaches people to think who never thought before, or who had forgotten how to think.'<sup>21</sup> This was particularly the case for women, who lacked status as citizens within the French Republic.<sup>22</sup> In the section 'On Women Writers' in *On Literature*, de Staël furthers her critique of the Revolution with the declaration that in the Republic 'most women belong neither to the natural nor the social order'.<sup>23</sup> She argues that since the Revolution, 'men have deemed it morally useful to reduce women to the most absurd mediocrity',<sup>24</sup> fostering a state of ignorance which leaves women unable to even educate their children. Linking individuals to nations enables de Staël to issue a two-pronged attack, campaigning for the improvement of the women's lot to improve the nation: 'Enlightening, teaching, and perfecting women together with men on the national and individual level: this must be the secret for the achievement of every reasonable goal, as well as the establishment of any permanent social or political relationships'.<sup>25</sup>

With de Staël exiled by Napoleon in 1803, *Corinne* was a product of being forced to leave her flailing homeland, with the text exploring the ideas raised in *On Literature* within a fictional context. Although de Staël claimed to have been careful to edit out any overtly

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<sup>20</sup> Victorine de Chastenay-Lanty, *Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay 1771–1815*, Vol. 2: *L'empire. La restauration. Les cent-jours* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1896), p. 445: 'Bonaparte l'avait persécutée de manière à ce qu'on dit qu'en Europe il fallait compter trois puissances: l'Angleterre, la Russie et Mme de Staël.'

<sup>21</sup> Claire Elisabeth Jeanne Gravier de Vergennes, Madame de Rémusat, *Memoirs of the Empress Josephine*, trans. by Frances Cashel Hoey and John Lillie, Vol. 2 (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1910), p. 496.

<sup>22</sup> Madame de Rémusat notes that Napoleon did approve of one woman writer: Madame de Genlis, 'a prude and *dévoté*' who supported the Republic and was, therefore, not deemed a threat. In contrast, he was not only jealous of Madame de Staël's talent, but particularly hated her willingness to challenge him, see Rémusat, *Memoirs of the Empress Josephine*, p. 498.

<sup>23</sup> Madame de Staël, 'On Literature', p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> De Staël, 'On Literature', p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> De Staël, 'On Literature', p. 205.

political message in her previous novel, *Delphine* (1802), Simone Balayé states that de Staël failed in this attempt as all of her work is ‘naturally political’, and argues that her work ‘must be understood in this fundamental light.’<sup>26</sup> *Delphine* is an epistolary novel concerned with the status of women, provocatively set during the Revolution. Despite claiming to ‘have carefully struck from these letters everything that might be related to the political events of those times’,<sup>27</sup> the novel raises issues of religion, divorce, and suicide. Whether she intended it or not, a woman picking up a pen is a political act, especially when she does so to explore the place of a woman of genius in society, as she does in *Corinne*.

### ***Corinne* in Context**

Corinne is a raven-haired woman of genius, who, constrained by her English upbringing, flees to Italy to pursue her talents and live an independent life. A heroine of mixed Italian and English heritage, it is only in Italy that she is lauded for her skill as an improvisational poet, or improvisatrice, and has the freedom to venture out in public and perform without inviting censure. Her renown sees her crowned at the capitol, in a ceremony modelled on that of Petrarch, and it is at this moment that Oswald, Lord Nelvil first sees the woman who will make him question what he wants in a wife. Characterized by his melancholy state of indecision, Oswald is torn between a sense of duty to his dead father and his desire for the unconventional woman he comes to love. Renouncing a patronym, this fascinating woman is known simply as Corinne, meaning that Oswald is initially unaware of any prior connection between their families; their fathers had planned to unite their children through marriage, but

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<sup>26</sup> Simone Balayé, ‘Pour une lecture politique de l’Allemagne de Madame de Staël’, in *Stendhal, l’écrivain, la société, le pouvoir*, Colloque du bicentenaire, Grenoble 24-27 Janvier 1983 (Grenoble, Presses de l’Université de Grenoble, 1984), p. 129, quoted in Avriel H. Goldberger, ‘Introduction’ to *Delphine* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. xv.

<sup>27</sup> Madam de Staël, ‘Preface’ to *Delphine*, ed. by Avriel H. Goldberger (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 8.

finding Corinne far too vivacious and eager to display her accomplishments, old Lord Nelvil had cast her aside as a potential wife for his son in favour of her more demure half-sister, Lucile. Oswald and Corinne fall in love as she leads him around the sights of Rome, and shows him her picture gallery at Tivoli. However, Oswald is racked with guilt at being absent during his father's demise, and feels bound to honour his choice of bride, knowing that Corinne would struggle to adapt to the expectations of his homeland if they were to marry.

The novel's immediate success saw it translated into English that very same year, with two competing editions vying for their share of the reading public. The British reading public was already familiar with the idea of a talented heroine symbolizing a nation from Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806).<sup>28</sup> However, as noted by Silvia Bordoni, Glorvina's recital of old Irish songs to transmit oral history is confined to a domestic setting, whereas Corinne publicly performs her original compositions.<sup>29</sup> Although *Corinne* was to go through fourteen editions between 1807 and 1810, the novel was not received without controversy owing to the heroine's conduct; her unconventional lifestyle as a public figure and celebrated improvisatrice deemed a cause for concern. Unsurprisingly, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 'cautioned all young persons from paying any attention to it'.<sup>30</sup> Aiming to 'expose its dangerous tendency',<sup>31</sup> the reviewer primarily objects to that fact that the heroine, like Mary Wollstonecraft, is prepared to live with her lover outside of marriage.<sup>32</sup> Whilst the literary merit of the text is granted, the seductions of de Staël's acclaimed prose render *Corinne* a threat with the potential to corrupt British morals. In contrast, *The Monthly Review* praised de

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<sup>28</sup> Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl: a National Tale*, ed. by Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Silvia Bordoni, 'Imaginary homeland: romantic women writers and Italy', PhD thesis, University of Nottingham (2004), pp. 184-85, accessed via the University of Nottingham repository [online]: <<http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/13190/1/408600.pdf>>[accessed 14/04/20]

<sup>30</sup> Anon, 'Review: *Corinne, ou l'Italie*', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; Or, Monthly Political, and Literary Censor*, Vol. 32: January-April 1809 (London: Printed for C. Cradock and W. Joy, 1809), pp. 454-59 (p. 454).

<sup>31</sup> Anon, *Anti-Jacobin Review* p. 454.

<sup>32</sup> Anon, *Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 459.

Staël's originality in combining a love story with a travelogue, remarking on the value of the detailed descriptions of Italy's art and antiquities, as well as the Italian national character.<sup>33</sup>

However, even favourable reviews, such as that published in *The Annual Review*, emphasized Corinne's Italianness; such freedom of manners and public display of talent would not be acceptable in Britain:

In appreciating its merits, we must constantly bear in mind that the scene does not lie in England, but in Italy. Nothing can be more improbable than the conduct of Corinna, or more unnatural than her character, if, as is commonly the case, with vulgar and ordinary readers, our own country is to be considered as the epitome of general character, and as the standard of propriety for general conduct.<sup>34</sup>

*The Edinburgh Review* adopted a more didactic approach, under the belief that readers would learn from Corinne's fate:

From the history and fate of the accomplished Corinna, the reader may learn to watch over a passion, which, if left to itself, may become one of the worst distempers of the mind, blasting and consuming even the noblest faculties. One may learn, too, the necessity of conforming to those rules that restrain the intercourse of the sexes, and that are not to be rashly dispensed with, even where no immediate danger is apprehended.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of the rules of courtship, de Staël adopts the two sister model to explore the idea of contrasting conduct. The use of different artistic talents as a marker of temperament can be seen in many novels of the period, including Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-85) and Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), through to Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Like West, de Staël illustrates the effect of different environments upon character development.<sup>36</sup> However, de Staël deviates in her

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<sup>33</sup> Anon, 'Art. VI. *Corinna, or Italy*', *The Monthly Review; Or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 54: September-December 1807 (London: R. Griffiths, 1807), pp. 152-59.

<sup>34</sup> Anon, *The Annual Review*, p. 673.

<sup>35</sup> Anon, 'Art. XII. *Corinne, ou L'Italie*. Par Madame De Staël Holstein', *The Edinburgh Review; Or, Critical Journal*, Vol. 11: October 1807-January 1808 (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co.; London: Constable, Hunter, Park, & Hunter, 1809), pp. 183-95 (p. 194).

<sup>36</sup> Jane West, *A Gossip's Story, and A Legendary Tale* (London: printed for T.N. Longman, 1796).

choice to focus all attention upon her doomed heroine. She does not present a reform in manners, as one sister's more socially acceptable behaviour influences the other, or even present the modest sister as a role model. Despite *The Edinburgh Review*'s claim that readers will learn the importance of observing social rules, the novel does not actually suggest that Lucile's English reserve is preferable to Corinne's Latin passion.

Although she may be presented as the English ideal, Lucile is a cipher who is absent for most of the novel. When she is present, the view of her is focalized through another character, such as Corinne, who sees her half-sister as a point of contrast: 'It seemed impossible to her that Oswald could resist the attraction of such a face. Mentally she compared herself to Lucile, and she thought herself so inferior'.<sup>37</sup> The reader only gets to know Lucile's thoughts when Corinne overhears her lament of her love for Oswald in prayer: 'I can be happy only with him, but never will he know that I love him. Never will this trembling heart betray its secret.'<sup>38</sup> Her silence may befit the rules of courtship, but the fact that she is too modest to express how much she really loves Oswald creates distance between them as a couple. The tragic love story, which eventually sees Corinne abandoned in favour of her half-sister, ends with the death of the artist heroine who loses her appetite for life without Oswald by her side. A negative reading of the text would suggest that there is no resolution possible between career and marriage; however brilliant and admired a talented woman artist may be, it was thought that she could not also possess the quietly domestic character of a wife. A contemporary real-life example of this can be seen in the letter from Anna Maria Porter, quoted in the previous chapter. However, a positive outcome can be identified in that Corinne educates Lucile and Oswald's daughter, Juliet. The combined influence of the two sisters creates a positive female model, even if the resemblance Juliet bears to Corinne continues to plague Oswald as a consequence.

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<sup>37</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 328.

<sup>38</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 344.

*Corinne*'s legacy has seen the novel provide an inspirational model for countless women artists and writers, including Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but the text also provoked conservative responses as a warning against emulating the woman of genius. Angela Wright's research into the first English translations of *Corinne* suggests that the 'bad translation' often commented upon by reviewers did not simply result in a loss of stylistic flair, but changed the sentiment of some passages. Although the *Monthly Review* believed that the English edition 'will not discredit Madame de Staël as a writer', they noted the problem that her words 'do not appear to best advantage in their English dress; the translation being not only incorrect, but debased by awkward and vulgar expressions'.<sup>39</sup> Wright argues that such textual distortions helped to create the climate for the text to be parodied.<sup>40</sup> Published in 1809, *The Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade* constitutes one of the earliest British responses to de Staël's novel. Taking the woman of genius as a character ripe for parody, the author emphasizes the foreign nature of the Corinne figure, noted by reviewers, by stressing the incompatibility of a public woman and British polite society. With the action transposed from Rome to a provincial English town, the folly of Corinne's conduct is exposed through bathos. Where thirty years earlier, Richard Samuel's *Living Muses of Great Britain* (1779) had heralded the woman artist with a utopian vision of Britain as a country where women's achievements were supported and celebrated, the counter-tradition ushered in, or at least augmented, by way of response to the 'Corinne Effect' reveals the artist as an un-British and anti-domestic threat to traditional values.

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<sup>39</sup> Anon, *Monthly Review*, p. 159.

<sup>40</sup> Angela Wright, 'Corinne in Distress: Translation as cultural misappropriation in the 1800s', *CW3 Journal: Corvey Women Writers on the Web*, 2: Madame de Staël and Corinne in England (Winter 2004), [Online]: <<https://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/cw3journal/Issue%20two/wright.html>> [accessed 19/08/19]

### Parodying *Corinne* in *The Corinna of England*

*The Corinna of England* only ran to one edition, but recognizing its significance in relation to its source text, Sylvia Bordonni has edited a new edition published as part of the Chawton House Library series of women's novels, describing the work as 'a precious text for the interpretation of the British reception of the political, social and cultural influences coming from continental Europe.'<sup>41</sup> Despite the pseudonym E.M.F suggesting that this is the work of E.M. Foster, the identity of the author remains subject to debate, with Garside, Raven, and Schöwerling citing Mrs E.G. Bayfield and J.H. James as other possible attributions.<sup>42</sup> For Bordonni, the difficulties in securing a firm attribution have affected the reception of the novel and its subsequent critical neglect. However, by advertising the novel as a work by the author of *The Winter in Bath*, *The Banks of the Wye*, *The Woman Colour*, and *Light and Shade*, the anonymous author of *The Corinna of England* is promoted as someone 'well known to the reading public of the time'.<sup>43</sup> In the same manner as de Staël contrasts *Corinne* and her half-sister, *Lucile*, *The Corinna of England* positions the morally questionable figure of Clarissa Moreton against her virtuous young cousin, Mary Cuthbert. However, where *Lucile* remains a cipher in de Staël's novel, absent or silent for the majority of the narrative, Mary, the 'heroine in the shade' of the title, is presented as the guiding moral compass of the piece through the use of a sympathetic third person narrator.

Following the death of her father, the orphaned heroine is sent to live with Clarissa under the misapprehension that she will act as a positive role model. Estranged from his brother, Mary's father had appointed Clarissa as his daughter's guardian without knowing

<sup>41</sup> Sylvia Bordonni, 'Introduction' to E.M. Foster, *The Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade; a Modern Romance*, Chawton House Literary Series: Women's Novels (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), p. viii.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel 1770-1820: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the Great British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> E.M. Foster, *The Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade; a Modern Romance*, ed. by Sylvia Bordonni, Chawton House Literary Series: Women's Novels (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), p. vii.

that she has scandalously transformed her family home into a salon having gained her independence upon her own father's death. Renaming the house the 'Attic Villa' alludes to the ancient philosophers of 'The School of Athens', as Sarah Scott does in *Millenium Hall*. However, this is not a utopian community of intellectual endeavour and community benevolence. Whilst Clarissa may aspire to greatness by surrounding herself with talented artists, writers, and thinkers, she only attracts talentless sycophants and frauds who exploit her hospitality and encourage her eccentric conduct through flattery.

The licentious conduct in the house shocks Mary as she sees her cousin openly courted by the Chevalier d'Aubert, a married French émigré. The reputation of the Attic Villa attracts visitors curious to meet Clarissa, and this is how the two cousins meet Montgomery, who arrives with his friend Walwyn. Replicating the love triangle at the centre of de Staël's novel, both women fall in love with Montgomery. Montgomery, however, is not attracted to an eccentric like Clarissa. When she dies attempting to escape from a fire at a Covent Garden theatre, the stage is left clear for Mary to step forward as the true heroine and marry Montgomery.

The cosmopolitan circle of so-called friends who frequent the salon is constructed to play upon negative national stereotypes, with Bordoni arguing that the author purposefully does this to put forward a counter-argument to de Staël's thoughts on national character and the benefits of a cosmopolitan outlook presented in works including *On Literature* (1800) and *On Germany* (1811). The collective includes: an Italian singer, Signora Grosera; her companion, Monsieur Myrtilla; Mr Germ, a botanist; and an artist known as Mr Copy; a 'tedious' man who only thinks of art, but without having real talent. The atmosphere is far from collegiate or harmonious, with complaints that music distracts Germ and Copy from their work. Productivity is low as they languish in luxury, but Copy is identified as the hand behind a portrait of Clarissa being crowned by the Muses 'which is thought a great

likeness'<sup>44</sup>. When Mary inquires of Walwyn whether Copy also designed the Muses and the Graces the answer is no: 'these were copies of copies, introduced at the desire of myself and some other of Miss Moreton's friends, who judged them symbolical and appropriate'.<sup>45</sup> Although Copy is mocked for the nature of his derivative works, the novel does convey a sense of the value to be found in art as Montgomery describes the role of the artist in terms of social improvement:

Painting is a noble employment – it speaks to the soul – it moves the passions – it warms the heart! When we behold generous actions portrayed on canvas; when we see the benign countenance of an hero; he seems to live again; he is brought to our mental as well as to our corporeal vision, and we feel as if we were participating in his emotion, whilst we are only looking at his mimic resemblance.<sup>46</sup>

Mary notes that Mr Copy's work does not fit this fine description, to which Montgomery replies that is because he is merely a copyist, not a painter. His level of absorption in his work does not match his talent; as a copyist, art should be a hobby, not his entire existence. Just as the artist is copying from other sources, Clarissa is herself a copy. Her portrait does not represent a positive influence, only mimicking a popular pose to reflect how she sees herself. In a case of style over substance, this is a false image with no depth.

The danger of copying is a key theme of the work as the author shows the folly of striving to emulate a heroine such as de Staël's Corinne or Delphine. The review printed in *The Lady's Monthly Museum* identifies precisely this didactic purpose to the satire, cautioning young girls in regards to the inherent dangers of imitating the conduct of a heroine such as Corinne:

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<sup>44</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 46.

This is an excellent satire on Madame de Staël's celebrated novel; and while the ingenious author pays the just tribute of praise to the talents of that too fascinating writer, she points out, in a diverting and sensible manner, the folly, not to say the madness, which would be exhibited in real life, were females to form themselves after the model of a Corinna, or a Delphine. It is admirably adapted to counteract the injurious tendency of those popular novels; since its deficiency, in point of ornamental diction, or enthusiastic sentiments, is amply compensated by good sense and morality.<sup>47</sup>

By mocking the pretensions of an artist heroine and presenting a moral counterpart, the text has the capacity to counteract the effects of de Staël's work.

Clarissa is a woman without any artistic talent, but she is flattered into thinking herself like Corinne when her admirer, d'Aubert, makes the comparison during their reading of de Staël's novel:

The lengths which she ran in pursuit of Lord Nelville; the fervid passion which she felt for him; her rejection of all common forms; her enthusiastic disposition; and her extemporising faculty, were all beheld by Miss Moreton as the reflected image of her own character. And, when she had read one or two of the improvisations of Corinna; when the Chevalier, observing her flushing cheek and flashing eye, had remarked on the similarity of her genius to that of Madam Staël's heroine, and, turning to her, had called her 'The Corinna of England,' the sickly brain of Miss Moreton became inflamed, and she resolved to imitate the inimitable Corinna, whenever opportunities should offer of discovering her genius to the world, or her passion to Montgomery.<sup>48</sup>

Her 'flushing cheek and flashing eye' display the physiological effects of Clarissa's reading of *Corinne*. Her 'inflamed', 'sickly' brain, already consumed with passion for Montgomery, leads her to misread de Staël's work. Linking artistic performance and courtship, Clarissa misguidedly makes the mistake of thinking that a public display of her talent will win her the love of the man she desires. The idea of 'imitating the inimitable' echoes Wincklemann's words in his *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755),

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<sup>47</sup> Anon, 'Review: *Corinna of England, and a Heroine in the Shade. By the Author of the Banks of the Wye, &c.*', *The Lady's Monthly Museum; Or, Polite Repository of Amusements and Instruction*, Vol. 7: July 1809 (London: Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe, 1809), pp. 42-43.

<sup>48</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 76-77.

whereby he suggests that ‘The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients’.<sup>49</sup> With a corruption of this sentiment seeing Clarissa attempt the impossible in imitating the inimitable, there is an ironic tone to the oxymoron. Clarissa takes the similarity between herself and Corinne as an endorsement of her behaviour and, as a consequence, she duly adopts the name ‘Corinna’ and sets about practising her ‘improvisations’ in the family chapel which she somewhat blasphemously converts into a private theatre. The very idea of rehearsing stands testament to the fact that she lacks natural talent and is not bestowed with a gift for spontaneous composition. The truth is that Clarissa lacks any talent, the programme of education encouraged by her proud father ‘calculated only for display’, providing no more than an appearance of accomplishment: ‘there was nothing solid or substantial in her abilities or acquirements, no depth of argument in her declamatory harangues, in which she had practised, from the early age of fifteen, to the attentive auditors round her father’s table.’<sup>50</sup> Clarissa ranks amongst the artfully ‘accomplished females’ discussed in Chapter Two, who court attention and advancement through artistic practice. Rather than seek to skilfully out-perform her contemporaries, she has been taught to stand out by asserting her opinions and not to mind if her manners deviate from those around her.

Clarissa will use fashionable, sentimental terms superficially, never actually acting on what she says: ‘philanthropy’ and ‘benevolence’ were words which were constantly jingling in her ears; and, the inflated victim of vanity and self-conceit, was easily persuaded, that she was the succouring angel that was sent to patronise genius and virtue on earth.’<sup>51</sup> In a critique of faux sensibility, the narrator describes her performance as no more than a selfish corruption of compassion. Clarissa is too self-centred to care about anyone other than herself and seeks only the admiration of others. Her clichéd language use loses meaning given that

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<sup>49</sup> Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 13.

Clarissa preaches benevolence whilst doing nothing to help a workman seriously injured whilst working on her theatre. She makes a performance of going to visit him to present him with some of her embroidery, yet fails to provide practical or financial support for a family struggling to get by without a labourer's wage.

The apogee of Clarissa's deluded imitation of Corinne comes when she delivers a rousing speech to the people of Coventry:

Ye Citizens of Coventry, free men of an ancient city, behold this day *another* woman speaks! *another* woman asserts the glorious prerogative of her sex, the bold freedom of thought and action, hitherto so exclusively, so unjustly confined to men alone! – People of Coventry, and do I then behold you sunk to a state of effeminacy and servitude! [...] People of Coventry! *Men!* possessed of capacious minds, of soaring genius, of depth of intellect; how do I behold you engaged?<sup>52</sup>

Taking Corinne's speech at the Capitol as a model, Clarissa's address is highly rhetorical, patterned with repetition for emphasis. Having practised with the Chevalier, this is not a poetic improvisation so much as a political speech, calling for national improvement in the arts. Whilst the practice of imitation does follow the directions prescribed by a classical education, the content is misjudged. The provincial context not only renders Clarissa's actions bathetic, but her speech has tragic consequences given that she unwittingly incites a riot. Calling for the men of Coventry to abandon their honest employment as weavers to become a glorious race of painters, poets, and heroes constitutes a grave misunderstanding of their basic needs. Speaking from a position of privilege, she does not understand that their priority is to feed their children, not to make great art. The ensuing riot reveals the novel's anti-Jacobin sentiment, with Clarissa representing dangerously contagious French ideas she has adopted from the novels she reads. She is not merely an unladylike, un-British eccentric, but a threat to society.

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<sup>52</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 82.

Mary Cuthbert stands in direct contrast to her cousin in that she does not cultivate the appearance of accomplishment to seek attention:

Mary Cuthbert's talents and acquirements were not of the brilliant cast; her understanding was good, her perception lively and acute; but her natural modesty and reservedness of disposition, added to her secluded education, and retirement in which she had lived at Woodberry, had given her whole demeanour and behaviour, an air of timidity and *mauvaise haute*, which, though did not diminish her natural and peculiar attractions in the eye of those who had discernment and understanding to appreciate them according to their value, made her appear to the followers of art and fashion as an awkward bashful girl calculated neither for ornament or amusement.<sup>53</sup>

Although Mary is presented as the preferable of the two women, she is not without fault. She is not socialized, making her awkward in company and difficult to read. It should not be forgotten that *The Corinna of England* is a comic work, with the epigraph from Henry Fielding's preface to *The History of Joseph Andrews* (1742) providing a notice that this is a piece combining politics and comedy in its unnatural exaggeration: 'What Caricature is in painting,' says Fielding, 'Burlesque is in writing'.<sup>54</sup> In light of the idea of excess, the polar opposites of Mary and Clarissa can both be laughed at. Fielding's response to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) in *Joseph Andrews* and *Shamela* (1741) illustrates how a seemingly too virtuous character can be subject to mistrust. However, in Foster's novel Clarissa remains the main target, with Bordoni observing that: '*The Corinna of England* seems to confirm what Staël had initially suggested in *Corinne*: England, specifically provincial England, does not welcome eccentric, exuberant, artistic women who want to display their more or less genuine talents in public.'<sup>55</sup> However, Clarissa's talents are not genuine and Mary lacks any interest in the arts. In light of this, Bordoni acknowledges 'the possibility that England would welcome a different kind of genius in women, one that could

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<sup>53</sup> Foster, *Corinna*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> The opening epigraph to *The Corinna of England*, attributed to the *Life of Hogarth*, quotes Henry Fielding's preface to *The History of Joseph Andrews* (1742). See Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Bordoni, 'Introduction' to *The Corinna of England*, p. xvii.

co-exist with the ideal of the proper lady'.<sup>56</sup> With neither heroine an artist in the true sense of the word, the novel does not actively engage with the idea of how a woman artist could live and work in England. However, other writers did attempt to reconcile domesticity and artistry in their responses to *Corinne*, namely: Hannah More in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, and Jane Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Hannah More's novel dispenses with the Corinne figure, instead grouping together accomplished females, such as the three misses Ranby, as a class to be ridiculed, as seen in Chapter Two of this thesis. Rather than work to shape the celebrated woman artist into a form palatable for a British audience, More develops the character of Lucile to highlight why the modest, domestic woman makes the best choice of wife. Lucilla's artistic skill lies in tending her garden; a practical pastime which shows her care for others by providing food for her family. For More, therefore, the woman artist can only thrive in Britain as a quietly domesticated, modest wife, not a lauded public figure.

As the story of two artistically talented sisters of very different temperaments, *Sense and Sensibility* can also be read as a response to the characters of Corinne and Lucile. Even though de Staël's novel is not listed amongst the works held in the Knight family libraries of Godmersham Park or Chawton House, Jane Austen is likely to have read *Corinne* given that she mentions it in a letter to her sister Cassandra, dated 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1808: 'I recommended him to read Corinna',<sup>57</sup> Austen recalls saying to Mr. Fitzhugh, a man who was so hard of hearing she joked he would not have heard a canon fired and had to communicate with him using her fingers. Whether she wanted to shock or tease him rather than make a genuine recommendation, it shows she was familiar with the novel. Henry Austen went as far as to revise his 1817 biographical notice for Bentley's Standard Novels edition of his sister's

<sup>56</sup> Bordoni, 'Introduction' to *The Corinna of England*, p. xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Jane Austen, Letter to Cassandra Austen, Wednesday 28 December, 1808, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.161.

works (1833) to include an anecdote suggesting that his sister refused to meet Madame de Staël as part of a literary gathering in London. Upon learning that ‘the celebrated Madame de Staël would be of the party’, she had ‘immediately declined the invitation.’ Emphasizing the difference between the two writers, Henry Austen believed that to the ‘truly delicate mind’ of his sister ‘such a display would have given pain instead of pleasure.’<sup>58</sup> Although this may be a retrospective attempt by the Austen family to secure her reputation, Jane Austen does respond to de Staël via *Sense and Sensibility*. Rather than kill off her Romantic heroine, Austen reforms Marianne through education.<sup>59</sup> Elinor similarly has to learn that she has been too measured in her conduct and has suffered greatly in concealing her true feelings. The resolution is that the two extremes of conduct, represented by Corinne and Lucile, actually need balance. Austen’s sister heroines are able to achieve this by learning from one another. What is more, for the Dashwood sisters, art is a domestic pastime, reserved for private meditation. As previously noted, they never consider using their talents to forge a career, even when they are forced to live in reduced circumstances.

Where *The Corinna of England* mocks the presumptions of the talentless, and More and Austen domesticate their heroines, Maria Jane Jewsbury’s later parody ‘The History of an Enthusiast’ (1830) presents the irreconcilable problems faced by a woman of talent pursuing a career.

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<sup>58</sup> Henry Austen, ‘Biographical Notice’, quoted in J.E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and other Family Recollections*, ed. by Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 149-50.

<sup>59</sup> The names Elinor and Marianne tellingly echo the names of other sister heroines: Ellinor and Matilda Sophia Lee’s *The Recess*, Elinor and Julia in Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, and Marianne and Louisa in Jane West’s *A Gossip’s Story*. With ‘Marianne’ the allegorical symbol of the French Republic, the use of this name for a passionate heroine links the character to what were seen as dangerous French ideas.

### Irreconcilable Differences in ‘The History of an Enthusiast’

Published in her collection, *The Three Histories*, Jewsbury’s novella ‘The History of an Enthusiast’ offers a more sympathetic, but perhaps no less tragic, take on the woman of genius as she attempts to articulate the anxieties she faced as a woman writer. Jewsbury had been working to become an author from the age of nine, but for a period following her mother’s death she was forced to put her literary aspirations aside in order to care for her siblings, recalling that her life ‘became so painfully, laboriously domestic that it was an absolute duty to crush intellectual tastes’.<sup>60</sup> In May 1826, Jewsbury experienced a mental breakdown, aggravated by the inner conflict between her literary ambitions and society’s negative views on public women. Joanne Wilkes describes Jewsbury’s illness as a ‘spiritual crisis’ owing to the fact that she had come to associate the literary life as constituting ‘a turning away from the Christian’s proper focus on eternal destiny’.<sup>61</sup> The perceived fragility of her professional legacy nevertheless remained a concern, expressed by Jewsbury with typically maudlin sentiment: ‘my poetry, except some half-dozen pieces, may be consigned to oblivion.’<sup>62</sup> Rather than seek to exorcise her demons by writing a work which reconciled a woman’s public and private roles, Jewsbury’s prose is full of pain as she describes her heroine’s path to literary fame at the cost of an unfulfilled family life.

More than just a personal lament, ‘The History of an Enthusiast’ responds to the Corinne myth to warn young women against making a misguided choice in life, having seen the effects of a literary career on her circle of friends, including the poet, Felicia Hemans. According to Wilkes, Jewsbury bases aspects of her heroine on the poet having ‘registered

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<sup>60</sup> Maria Jane Jewsbury, *Occasional Papers*, ed. by Eric Gillett (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. xviii.

<sup>61</sup> Joanne Wilkes, ‘Jewsbury [married name Fletcher], Maria Jane (1800–1833)’, ODNB, Published 23 September 2004, [online]: <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14816>> [accessed 09/07/18]

<sup>62</sup> Maria Jane Jewsbury, quoted in *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, Vol. 19 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1835), pp. 414-16 (p. 416).

the increasing loneliness Hemans endured despite her literary renown'.<sup>63</sup> However, Jewsbury acknowledged that she also put aspects of her own life into her work: 'My 'Three Histories' has most of myself in them, but they are fragmentary. Public report has fastened the 'Julia' upon me; the childhood, the opening years, and many of the after *opinions* are correct; but all else is fabulous.'<sup>64</sup> As Norma Clarke has identified, Julia Osborne is 'a composite of Felicia Hemans and Maria Jane Jewsbury out of Madame de Staël's *Corinne*'.<sup>65</sup> Expanding on the *Corinne* type through personal experience and authorial creative license develops an evolving chain of influence; the very choice to name the character Julia responding to de Staël's Juliet in a move to consider the next generation of educated women. Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet chart this reference from Rousseau's *Julie; Ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), noting that 'Rousseau's Julie becomes Staël's Juliette who is then reproduced as Jewsbury's Julia.'<sup>66</sup>

Julia Osborne is a natural born genius. Although she possesses talent, she is introduced as a naughty child who is raised by a grandmother who bans her from reading under the belief that no good can come from being bookish. Her only daughter had eloped with a 'flute-playing, verse-making, sketch-taking, love-and-idleness kind of man, whose frequent appeals to his father-in-law's purse, and final desertion of his family, had ever after induced her to consider talent as connected, in some inexplicable manner, with poverty, ill conduct, and disgrace.'<sup>67</sup> Unbeknown to her grandmother, Julia borrows books from their

<sup>63</sup> Wilkes, 'Jewsbury', ODNB Online.

<sup>64</sup> Jewsbury, quoted in *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, p. 416.

<sup>65</sup> Norma Clarke, *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love – The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Carlyle* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet, 'Corinne and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning', in *The Novel's Seductions: Stael's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. by Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press & London: Associated University Press, 1999), pp. 204-20 (p. 214). See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie; Or, The New Heloise*, trans. and ed. by Jean Vaché and Philip Stewart, Vol. 6: Collected Writings of Rousseau (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 1997). This epistolary novel, originally entitled *Lettres de Deux Amans, Habitans d'une petite Ville au pied des Alpes* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1761), is comprised of letters exchanged between the lovers Julie d'Etange and St. Preux as they are torn between passion and virtue; their individual desires and the expectations of society.

<sup>67</sup> Maria Jane Jewsbury, 'The History of an Enthusiast', *The Three Histories* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1831), p. 18.

neighbour, Mr Mortimer, who recognizes her genius and names her ‘Penseroso’. His own daughter, Annette, is ‘giddy’ in comparison, as revealed through their contrasting answers to what they hope the future has in store. Annette responds: ‘I must be content when I am a great deal older – to make a charming wife, to some very, very charming man, just like yourself’,<sup>68</sup> whereas Julia exclaims: ‘I choose Fame’, claiming that, ‘It would make amends for being a woman – I should not pass away and perish’.<sup>69</sup> She chooses the laurel crown as a means of keeping her memory alive in the full knowledge that the path will be difficult, recalling Jewsbury’s own anxieties regarding her legacy.

The desire for personal fame proves to be Julia’s downfall, as such a solipsistic motivation does not provide a positive channel for her enthusiasm. Jewsbury’s choice of title, identifying her heroine’s history as that of an ‘enthusiast’, does itself constitute a response to de Staël. In *Corinne*, the improvisatrice describes how the ‘supernatural enthusiasm’ behind her compositions works for the greater good:

Sometimes the passionate interest aroused in me by a conversation on the great, noble questions about man’s moral being, his destiny, his objective, his duties, his affections, raises me above my powers, enables me to discover in nature, in my own heart, bold truths, expressions full of life, which solitary reflection would not have produced. At such times I think I experience a supernatural enthusiasm and I have the definite feeling that the voice within me is of greater worth than myself.<sup>70</sup>

For de Staël, enthusiasm is what frees the poet from self-interest, opening up the possibility for Corinne to speak eternal truths from a universal point of view and inspire social change: ‘I am a poet when I admire, when I scorn, when I despise, when I hate, not out of personal feelings, not for my own sake, but for the dignity of humankind and the glory of the world.’<sup>71</sup> As Kari Lokke explains, de Staël ‘imagines an abyss between destructive fanaticism,

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<sup>68</sup> Jewsbury, ‘The History of an Enthusiast’, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Jewsbury, ‘The History of an Enthusiast’, p. 25.

<sup>70</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 46.

<sup>71</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 46.

associated with myopic individual interest, and emancipating enthusiasm identified with visionary collective good.<sup>72</sup> What is needed in order to feel their positive effects is a climate of liberty. Despite de Staël's attempt to recover the positive side of 'enthusiasm', it retained its dangerous association with religious fanaticism into the Regency period.<sup>73</sup> Lokke argues that 'the professionalization and commodification of female authorship in Regency Britain shaped women writers' responses to Staël's continental and idealist conception of enthusiasm, tainting it with associations of excessive self-promotion and commercialization'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, in 'The History of an Enthusiast', it is the heroine's pursuit of personal glory, coupled with the fickle state of the literary marketplace, that is overtly critiqued. Furthermore, the novella also warns against pursuing an education based on what are seen as destructively melancholic Romantic texts, including the work of de Staël being parodied here.

Julia progresses from secretly reading Shakespeare whilst hiding up an apple tree, to undertaking a classical education from the local minister, whose Oxford-educated son, Cecil, she gradually falls in love with. The traditionally masculine education provided by the classics improves her, unlike the German and English works she later discovers. The classics may have fed her rational mind, but Romantic works 'unlocked a new sphere of existence';<sup>75</sup> opening up a world of emotion and imagination. Observing a melancholy turn in her disposition, Cecil entreats her to throw away these 'intense', 'dreamy', 'passionate' texts. Where Cecil only sees their debilitating effects, proposing that 'Goëthe and Schiller, Petrarch

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<sup>72</sup> Kari Lokke, 'British Legacies of *Corinne* and the Commercialization of Enthusiasm', in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society and the Sister Arts*, ed. by Tili Boon Cuillé & Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), pp.171- 90 (pp. 173-74).

<sup>73</sup> See Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the policing of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Lokke, 'British Legacies of *Corinne*', p. 172.

<sup>75</sup> Jewsbury, 'The History of an Enthusiast', p. 58.

and de Staël, and Shelly [sic], and a dozen others, [...] will be productive of more loss than gain',<sup>76</sup> Julia perceives the advantages to a melancholy temperament.

Julia argues that melancholia is more than sadness; it gives her strength: 'Who calls melancholy sad? All lovely objects have their pensive aspect, - the sky, the moon, the forest, - why not the mind of man?'<sup>77</sup> For Julia, melancholia is a productive, elemental force which aligns her mind with nature and enables her to think and feel on a higher plane. As suggested by the title 'The History of an Enthusiast', the novella describes the heroine's *enthusiastic* inspiration. Jewsbury enters into a dialogue with de Staël in her treatment of Julia's melancholia and enthusiasm, both of which de Staël associates with political freedom and civic virtue. In *On Germany*, de Staël describes how the superiority of man depends upon the balance of a melancholic longing for what is lost with the drive to move forward, suggesting 'this mix of contemplation and activity, of resignation and will, allows man to link to the heavens his life in this world.'<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, enthusiasm, in the sense of feeling the presence of a god within, should lead to tolerance, not fanaticism, as it 'makes us feel the interest and beauty of everything.'<sup>79</sup> In short, melancholic enthusiasm should expand the mind, but self-interest prevents this for Julia. A destructive focus upon her personal lot sees Julia become restless, admitting that she wishes she had a love for home. There is a sense that she will never be happy because she will never settle. She cannot reconcile looking back with looking forward, and will always strive for more in a quest for an unattainable spiritual communion, even though she has fallen in love with Cecil.

Putting her confused feelings aside, Julia moves to London to pursue a literary career. Melancholia fuels her creativity when Cecil leaves to tour Europe, her hope being that her

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<sup>76</sup> Jewsbury, 'The History of an Enthusiast', p. 59.

<sup>77</sup> Jewsbury, 'The History of an Enthusiast', p. 68.

<sup>78</sup> Madame de Staël, *Germany*, ed. by Orlando Williams Wight, Vol. 2 (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), p. 312.

<sup>79</sup> De Staël, *Germany*, p. 364.

success will mean that he will hear her name praised. Although her first book is successful, life in the capital proves artificial. Full of superficial delights and the praise of false friends, her literary life in London is commercially motivated. Rather than *inspired* work, she is driven by the constant pressure to publish and stay relevant in the eyes of fickle patrons and publishers. In her absence, Cecil has married a demure woman named Mary. Although the novel does not end with Julia's death, heartbroken and unfulfilled, she sets out to travel around Europe fully prepared never to return. Annette, meanwhile, has matured into a happy wife and mother, reinforcing the moral not to follow the path to Fame. The overriding message is that whilst women are capable of genius, they ultimately cannot find lasting fulfilment or happiness outside of the domestic sphere.

With Julia set to leave for Italy, land of Corinne, Lokke reads the ending of 'The History of an Enthusiast' as an 'opening up the possibility of a new and exciting life for her headstrong artist heroine'.<sup>80</sup> However, Julia leaves having written a will in the expectation that she will not live to see her life change. Although replication of the Corinne model does not arrive at a resolution, it does open up a conversation regarding what is possible or acceptable. However, where in the previous chapter comedy was used to widen the opportunities for women in the arts, the chain of response generated by *Corinne* sees parody used to mock the presumptuous artist heroine, reinforcing gender boundaries rather than addressing how a professional artist could live and work. Although illustrative of how the Corinne figure was received in Britain, such a response is not limited to parody texts. Novels more loosely connected with *Corinne* display the social anxiety surrounding an autonomous woman. The nameless musician heroine of Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), for example, struggles to make her way in the world without the security of a patronymic identity.

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<sup>80</sup> Lokke, 'British Legacies of *Corinne*', p.186.

Novels written in response to *Corinne* serve to illustrate that part of the problem lies in the novel form itself. In the preface to *Delphine*, de Staël had outlined the various problems and prejudices associated with writing a novel. Although there are advantages to attracting a wide readership, she knew that in publishing a novel she would attract judgement from all sides: ‘Of all literary writing, novels have the most judges; there is virtually no one without the right to pronounce on the merits of a novel; even those readers most sceptical and modest about the quality of their minds properly trust their reactions.’ De Staël believed that the volume of novels being published led to the assumption that they represented a simplistic form: ‘mediocre novels have been produced in such numbers’, she laments, ‘that most people are tempted to think these kinds of compositions are the simplest of all, whereas it is precisely the multiplicity of attempts in this sphere which add to its difficulty.’<sup>81</sup> De Stael’s impassioned defence of the novel as ‘a kind of confession stolen from those who have lived as from those who will live’<sup>82</sup> possibly influenced the observation made by the narrator of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), whereby it is archly stated that the novel is ‘only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed.’<sup>83</sup> De Staël, wary of intellectual sterility and cultural homogeneity, believed that ‘when we read the writing of a nation whose outlook and feelings are very different [...] our mind is excited by new comparisons, our imagination is enlivened as much by the audacities it condemns as by those it approves’.<sup>84</sup> The British audience certainly noted the cultural differences of *Corinne*, sparking debate on the suitability of this novel and its artist heroine. However, with *Corinne* being an improvisatrice and the novel critiqued as a lower form of literature, poetry potentially represents a more relevant medium for women writers to fully embody *Corinne* and negotiate the issue of their professional status.

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<sup>81</sup> De Staël, ‘Preface’ to *Delphine*, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> De Staël, ‘Preface’ to *Delphine*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 25

<sup>84</sup> De Staël, ‘Preface’ to *Delphine*, p. 5-6.

### Corinne as Improvisatrice

In a letter to *The Athenaeum* dated August 1808, the correspondent describes ‘Being lately at a conversation in which the merits of Madame de Staël’s late novel were canvassed’, going on to exclaim his surprise ‘to hear the possibility of Corinne’s extemporaneous effusions called in question’.<sup>85</sup> The ensuing article provides a history of the practice from the sixteenth century through to the present, giving notable examples in order to account for Corinne’s talent. Corinne is not only a poet, but a talented musician, dancer, actress, and painter, yet it is her skill as an improvisatrice which earns her national renown. Although the oral improvisation of poetry is not a uniquely Italian tradition, the figure of the improvisatore has a long-standing association with the country, with Angela Esterhammer noting that nowhere did improvisation become ‘as mainstream as in Italy’.<sup>86</sup> This was particularly the case during the late-fifteenth century, before enjoying a resurgence in popularity during the eighteenth century.

Despite the question raised in *The Athenaeum*, the extempore performance of poetry was a familiar sight to British travellers. Drawing on the experience of Hester Lynch Piozzi, Esterhammer describes how watching an improvisatore ‘confirmed the Grand Tourist’s notion of the Italian “national character” as ardent, witty, and sponanteous - and conversely, of course, bolstered the self-image of the English and their poetry as more *judicious, regular, and cultivated*’.<sup>87</sup> Along with the idea of national character, responses to improvised performances raise the issue of what it means to be a poet and the literary value of such

<sup>85</sup> Anon, ‘On the Improvisatori of Italy’, *The Athenaeum*, 4.20: July-December 1808 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), pp. 119-20 (p. 119).

<sup>86</sup> Angela Esterhammer, ‘The Cosmopolitan improvisatore: Spontaneity and Performance in Romantic Poetics’, *European Romantic Review*, 16:2 (April 2005), 153-65 (p. 156).

<sup>87</sup> Esterhammer ‘The Cosmopolitan improvisatore’, p. 156. For Piozzi’s use of the terms *judicious, regular, and cultivated*, see Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (Dublin: H. Chamberlaine, 1789), p. 410. Piozzi’s delineation is based upon an analogy between land and mind: ‘The mind of the Italian is commonly like his country, extensive, warm, and beautiful from the irregular diversification of its ideas; an ardent character, a glowing landscape. That of an Englishman is cultivated, rich, and regularly disposed; a steady character, a delicious landscape.’

performances, as seen in the description penned by Tobias Smollett in his *Travels Through France and Italy* (1765):

One of the greatest curiosities you meet with in Italy, is the Improvisatore; such is the name given to certain individuals, who have the surprising talent of reciting verses extempore, on any subject you propose. [...] The Italians are so fond of poetry, that many of them have the best parts of Ariosto, Tasso, and Petrarch, by heart; and these are the great sources from which the Improvisatori draw their rhimes, cadence, and turns of expression.<sup>88</sup>

Smollett's account suggests that the improvisatori are able to extemporize because they imitate from the models provided by the likes of Ariosto, Tasso, and Petrarch. Rather than channelling emotion into poetry, the practice of responding to any topic proposed by a Grand Tourist speaks of a hack versifying to order, and for this reason the improvisatori attracted as much ridicule as they did praise.

Whilst Lord Byron observed that 'their poetry is more mechanical than you suppose'<sup>89</sup>, Mary and Percy Shelley were more impressed with what appeared supernatural inspiration. In her essay 'The English in Italy' (1826), Mary Shelley recalls the affective experience of listening to the renowned actor and poet, Tommaso Sgricci: 'The poet himself forgets all his former imaginations, and is hurried on to create fresh imagery, while the effects of his former inspirations are borne away with the breath that uttered them, never again to be recalled-'.<sup>90</sup> Mary Shelley's account not only reveals the immediacy of the shared emotive experience between the poet and their audience, but emphasizes the ephemeral nature of the performance itself. Sgricci has hurried over ideas he will not be able to recall and record at a later date. In his essay 'On the Improvisors' (1806), Carl Ludwig Fernow

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<sup>88</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, ed. by Frank Felsenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 222-23.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Medwin, *Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 137.

<sup>90</sup> Mary Shelley, 'The English in Italy', *The Mary Shelley Reader*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 341-57 (p. 352). First Published as 'Article IV', *Westminster Review*, Vol. 6 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), pp. 325-41.

emphasized the participatory dimension to an improvisation, with the poet's performance influenced by the presence of an audience:

As soon as the idea is introduced in a stanza, and the rhyme set up for a corresponding rhyme, the imagination of the listener works along with the poet, and whenever he happens on the same idea as the former, or else surprises his disappointed expectation with a novel turn, or else successfully escapes a difficulty, the affect of joy and wonder breaks out in loud acclaim that becomes livelier and more sonorous the more the singer and the hearer set one another in motion, until it finally gushes forth in general rejoicing when the goal is successfully attained.<sup>91</sup>

The auditor's reception of these ideas is bound to the moment of utterance. As Mary Shelley noted, she was later left unmoved upon reading a transcript of another of Sgricci's performances: 'it struck us as inferior in poetry, and was certainly a very different production.'<sup>92</sup> Caroline Gonda quotes this extract as evidence of the difference in character between an oral performance and a written record: 'The improviser's performance of its very nature cannot be rendered as 'text', cannot survive the performer's absence.'<sup>93</sup> With the performer key to the performance and reception of their work, the artist is effectively bound to, or embodied by, their art.<sup>94</sup>

Even though the improvisational poet is able to generate a powerfully affective, reciprocal relationship with their audience, the performance remains of a moment and cannot be successfully captured or replicated. Furthermore, Mary Shelley's exclamation, 'God knows what this man wd be if he laboured and become a poet for posterity instead of an Improvisatore for the present', reveals the chasm between the poet who writes for posterity and the transience of the improvisatore's words. However, Shelley does go on to concede that she is 'enclined to think that in the perfection in which he possesses this art it is by no means

<sup>91</sup> Carl Ludwig Fernow, 'Über die Improvisatoren', *Römische Studien*, Vol 2 of 2 (Zürich: Gessner, 1806), pp. 298-416 (p. 313), quoted in Esterhammer, 'The Cosmopolitan improvvisatore', pp. 156-57.

<sup>92</sup> Shelley, 'The English in Italy', footnote p. 352.

<sup>93</sup> Caroline Gonda, 'The Rise and Fall of the Improvisatore, 1753-1845', *Romanticism*, 6.2 (2000), 195-210 (p. 208).

<sup>94</sup> Gonda, 'The Rise and Fall of the Improvisatore', p. 203-04.

an inferior power to that of a printed poet'.<sup>95</sup> In Wordsworthian terms, the practice of the improvisational poet does not fit with the idea of poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', famously outlined in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).<sup>96</sup> This was a critique recognized by de Staël in *On Literature* (1800):

The crowd of quite eminent improvisatori who make verses as quickly as you can speak is cited as a proof of the advantages of Italian for poetry. I believe on the contrary that this extreme facility of the language is one of its defects, and one of the obstacles it sets up for good poets seeking to perfect their style to the utmost. The gradations of thought, the nuances of feelings, need to be deepened by reflection; and those crowds of agreeable words which offer themselves to Italian poets to make verses with, are like flattering courtiers who make it unnecessary to seek, and often impossible to find, a true friend.<sup>97</sup>

Recalling de Staël's thoughts on the cultural status of the novel, too many practitioners lessened the value by creating a perception of ease and mediocrity. Although the Italian language is well-suited to poetry, for de Staël this means that everyone attempts it and the praise raised from the speed of composition does not encourage deeper thought or consideration.

In light of this critique, Caroline Gonda accounts for de Staël's choice to characterize her heroine as an improvisatrice by reading Corinne as a stand-out exception to the rule. Representing natural talent rather than forced imitation, she is alternately a divinely inspired Sibyl, or Aeolian harp.<sup>98</sup> Corinne's observation that she creates works which 'solitary reflection would not have produced'<sup>99</sup> recognizes the difference between the poet and the improviser in a way that raises the status of the improvisatrice. Combining the natural and

<sup>95</sup> Mary Shelley, Letter to Leigh Hunt, 29 December 1820, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, Vol. I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 170-75 (p.171).

<sup>96</sup> William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Longman & Rees, 1800), p, xxxiii.

<sup>97</sup> Caroline Gonda's translation of Germaine de Staël, *De la Littérature* (1800) from *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol 4 of 17 (Paris, 1820-21), p. 247. See Gonda, 'The Rise and Fall of the Improvisatore', p.197.

<sup>98</sup> Gonda, 'The Rise and Fall of the Improvisatore', p. 199.

<sup>99</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 46.

the divine, Corinne's powers of composition rank her above the country's many mediocre poets and improvisers.

Despite extemporized performance being critiqued for lacking reflection, Jeffrey C. Robinson positions improvisational poetics as 'defining for "later" British Romanticism',<sup>100</sup> with Percy Shelley extolling the ease with which poetry should flow in his posthumously published essay, 'A Defence of Poetry' (1840):

Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternation of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than a lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.<sup>101</sup>

Whilst likening the poet to an Aeolian harp shows an attraction to the idea of improvisation, for Shelley, the poet is not so much a channel for universal truths as a responsive receiver, given that a transformative effect occurs within the poet. Shelley goes on to make the comparison to a child's expression of delight whilst at play: 'so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause.'<sup>102</sup> The poet does not simply respond to stimuli in the moment, but seeks continuation. Engaging with idea of improvisation at a remove, via the written word, effectively allows time and space for reflection as well as allowing for a continuation of the moment of inspiration.

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<sup>100</sup> Jeffrey C. Robinson, 'Romantic Poetry: The Possibilities for Improvisation', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 38. 3: The Wordsworth-Coleridge Association Meeting 2006 (Summer 2007), 94-100 (p. 94).

<sup>101</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' (Portland, Maine: Thomas B. Mosher, 1910), pp. 4-5. This essay was penned in 1821 as a response to Thomas Love Peacock's article, 'The Four Ages of Poetry' (1820). However, it was not published until 1840, when it appeared in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. by Mary Shelley (London: Edward Moxon, 1840).

<sup>102</sup> Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', p. 5.

When the nature of improvisation can be as easily praised as it can be critiqued, de Staël's decision to make her heroine an improvisatrice is an apt choice in order to stimulate debate surrounding the nature and status of women's art. The line of enquiry regarding de Staël's choice can, therefore, be developed further in terms of gender. When George Bethune suggested that women poets 'write from impulse, and rapidly as they think' he elaborated that this means 'without the slow process of reasoning through which men have to pass.'<sup>103</sup> With a lack of reflection considered symptomatic of women's poetry, improvisation becomes seen as a feminized form.

Providing a model for Corinne, Maria Maddelena Morelli Fernandez (1727-1800), known as Corilla Olimpica, followed Petrarch, Tasso, and Perfetti to be crowned at the Capitol in 1776. Discussing the feminization of improvisation, Giovanni Carsanigra names Teresa Bandettini (1763-1837), Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici (1755-1824), and her daughter Messimina (1788-1846) as other important female exponents, but admits that the oral form is a key factor as to why they have been excluded from the canon.<sup>104</sup> Poetic improvisation, therefore, enables de Staël to comment upon the idea of memory and memorialization. Destined to flow into obscurity, the improvisatrice is an apt metonymical figure for the female artist, yet Corinne's resounding last plea, 'Remember my verses sometimes, for my soul is stamped on them',<sup>105</sup> not only speaks of women bound to their art before being forgotten, but appeals for change.

The legacy of the lyric poet Sappho further illustrates the ephemeral nature of oral productions and the fragility of their transmission when only fragments of her compositions survive in written form. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of Corinne's

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<sup>103</sup> George W. Bethune, *British Female Poets: With Biographical and Critical Notices* (Philadelphia, PA: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1848), pp. viii-ix.

<sup>104</sup> Giovanni Carsanigra, 'The Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)', in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. by Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 397-456 (pp. 404-05).

<sup>105</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, p. 402.

improvisations as text within the novel is problematic in itself. Not only is Corinne's talent lauded to the extent that it is difficult for any attempt at rendering her speech as text to live up to expectations; it is a paradox to actually include Corinne's verses embedded in the novel. As Vincent Whitman proposes, 'Any representation of Corinne's improvisation – even if it were great poetry – is bound to be problematical to the point of self-contradiction, a textual arresting of an essentially ephemeral utterance'.<sup>106</sup> Even if de Staël had produced great poetry, the inclusion of oral improvisation would still be at odds with the medium of a printed text. The paradox of embedding improvised verses also proved an issue for Letitia Elizabeth Landon when she translated Corinne's improvisations into English verse for the 1833 Standard Novels edition of the text. Upon publication, *The Metropolitan Magazine* remarked: 'Of all Miss Landon's verse, these translations are what we the least like. How is it possible that one who so much shines as an original writer, can be so very *fade* as a translator?'<sup>107</sup> Applying Whitman's observations on Corinne's verses to Landon's translation would suggest that her work fell short because she had attempted a nigh-on impossible task. However, *The Literary Gazette* provided a more positive assessment: 'We observe, that L.E.L. has contributed a charm to this production by what may well be considered an exercise of poetical talent, viz. that of rendering several of the original compositions into English.'<sup>108</sup> Noting the skill and feeling in her work, it was all too easy to characterize Landon as a Corinne figure herself. As well as being bound with ideas of gender, nation, and memorialization, the figure of the improvisatrice in Romantic women's poetry engenders the doubling of the poet with their subject, as seen in Landon's poetic response to *Corinne*, 'The Improvisatrice' (1824).

<sup>106</sup> Vincent Whitman, "'Remember My Verse Sometimes": Corinne's Three Songs', in *The Novel's Seductions*, ed. by Szmurlo, pp. 55-68 (p. 57).

<sup>107</sup> Anon, 'Corinne; or, Italy', *The Metropolitan Magazine*, 6.24: April 1833 (London: Saunders and Otley; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; Smith and Son: Glasgow; W.F. Wakeman: Dublin), p. 116.

<sup>108</sup> Anon, 'Standard Novels, No. XXXIV: Mad. De Staël's *Corinne*. Translated by Miss Isabel Hill; with Metrical Versions of the "Chants," or Odes, by Miss Landon', *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences* (London: H. Colburn, 1833), p. 102.

### L.E.L. and ‘The Improvisatrice’

Landon’s first collection, *The Improvisatrice and Other Poems* (1824), proved popular, running into six editions during the first year alone. Publishing her work anonymously, under the initials L.E.L., led to readers, including Edward Bulwer-Lytton, to speculate as to her appearance. Reviewing her novel *Romance and Reality* in 1831, Bulwer-Lytton recalled the excitement amongst his peers following her debut in the *Literary Gazette*: ‘Was she young? Was she pretty?’<sup>109</sup> The review of Landon’s ‘The Improvisatrice’ in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* raised the issue of her appearance whilst supposedly attempting to deny their interest: ‘Now it is not because she is a very pretty girl, and a very good girl, that we are going to praise her poems, but because we like them.’<sup>110</sup> Taking an essentialist view of women’s writing, the reviewer expresses the suitability of her chosen subject matter; that is, love:

We have heard it said that in Miss Landon’s volume there was too much love, and that it would be desirable if she would write on something else. We beg your pardon – it would not. If she could change her sex, and become a He, then, as the conundrum has it, the affair would be altered; but as things are, she is quite right. Nothing can be truer than that maxim of our MIGHTY MORALIST, that woman equals man in that one glorious passion, and that one only; and, consequently, in it alone has any chance of rivalling the bearded lords of creation.<sup>111</sup>

Landon’s reputed beauty, coupled with her preferred subject matter, led to rumours about her own love life, with readers assuming a biographical link between the poet and her poetry. Although Landon’s advertisement for ‘The Improvisatrice’ states that ‘poetry needs no preface’, she is quick to employ paratextual material to confirm that her improvisatrice is *entirely* a product of Italy and emphasizes the point that ‘She is supposed to relate her own

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<sup>109</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton, ‘*Romance and Reality* by L.E.L.’, *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 32: December 1831 (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), p. 546.

<sup>110</sup> Anon, ‘Miss Landon’s Poetry’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 16: August 1824 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1824), pp. 189-94 (p. 190).

<sup>111</sup> Anon, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 190.

history’, in an attempt to distance herself from possible claims that she is writing a personal account of her own poetic process or disappointment in love:

ADVERTISEMENT.

POETRY needs no Preface: if it do not speak for itself, no comment can render it explicit. I have only, therefore, to state that *The Improvisatrice* is an attempt to illustrate that species of inspiration common in Italy, where the mind is warmed from earliest childhood by all that is beautiful in Nature and glorious in Art. The character depicted is entirely Italian, a young female with all the loveliness, vivid feeling, and genius of her own impassioned land. She is supposed to relate her own history; with which are intermixed the tales and episodes which various circumstances call forth.<sup>112</sup>

‘*The Improvisatrice*’ is a narrative poem written in the first person, making it easy to see Landon as the improvisatrice of the piece as the poet blends with her subject. However, publishing as L.E.L. creates a layer of separation between Landon, the woman, Landon, the poet, and her improvisatrice narrator. Landon’s ‘*The Improvisatrice*’ acknowledges that women artists and writers are embodied by their work, but simultaneously resists this deep-rooted level of association with her subject whilst also using it to comment upon the sister arts ideal and the universal truth of female experience.

The fact that embedded within the poem are ‘the texts of seven “songs”, a narrative “tale” and descriptions of three paintings, two of which are attributed to the improvisatrice’, leads Stephen Behrendt to describe Landon’s work as ‘insistently interdisciplinary’.<sup>113</sup> Landon’s improvisatrice, like de Staël’s *Corinne*, is an Italian artist, skilled in music and

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<sup>112</sup> L.E.L., Advertisement to *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1824).

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Behrendt, ‘This Is Not an Improvisation: Letitia Landon and the Slipperiness of Taxonomy’, *The European Legacy*, 24.3-4 (2019), 283-300 (p. 291).

painting. Italy has shaped her and she is proud to have grown up surrounded by the art, music, and language of her homeland. However, where de Staël privileges her heroine's talent for improvisation, Landon blends the accomplishments as sister arts: 'I knew not which I loved the most --/Pencil or lute, -- both loved so well.'<sup>114</sup> The poem opens with a description of her painting of Petrarch and Laura; an image which elicits a mixture of sadness and pride from the recollection of first seeing it displayed on the gallery wall:

Oh, yet my pulse throbs to recall,  
 When first upon the gallery's wall  
 Picture of mine was placed, to share  
 Wonder and praise from each on there!  
 Sad were my shades; methinks they had  
 Almost a tone of prophecy –  
 I ever had, from earliest youth,  
 A feeling what my fate would be.<sup>115</sup>

The improvisatrice's paintings of historical and mythological scenes provide a prophecy of her fate, linking her to those who have suffered the pain of an unrequited attachment. Once she has been abandoned by her lover, Lorenzo, Landon's improvisatrice begins painting Ariadne, the 'Cretan Maid' abandoned by Theseus after she had helped him to defeat the Minotaur. Her artistic practice sees the improvisatrice's identity merge with that of the subject of her painting. Her grief and passion are transferred into the image she produces in the hope that Lorenzo will not only feel her pain, but be induced to feel the same way:

I had now but one hope: -- that when  
 The hand that traced these tints was cold –  
 Its pulse but in their passion seen –  
 Lorenzo might these tints behold,  
 And my grief;--think—see—feel all  
 I felt, in this memorial!<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> L.E.L. 'The Improvisatrice', *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1824), pp. 1-108 (p. 3, Lines 31-32).

<sup>115</sup> L.E.L. 'The Improvisatrice', p. 3, Lines 33-40.

<sup>116</sup> L.E.L. 'The Improvisatrice', p. 90, Lines 1343-1348.

Ekphrasis provides the opportunity for the boundary between words and images to blur, enhancing their meaning. The ephemeral nature of an improvisatrice, whose words are destined to fade away, is captured in a memorializing work of visual art. The improvisatrice's physical resemblance to the Ariadne depicted leaves a lasting memorial testifying to her love once her words have gone. Engaging with the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, both words and image embody the artist and are capable of communicating emotion and eliciting an emotional response from the audience. However, Landon highlights the differences between painting and poetry, as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing does in his influential *Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766).<sup>117</sup> Where Lessing's focus lies in delineating how a painting captures a moment in space and sound unfolds over time, Landon is concerned with the lasting testament provided by a fixed visual record when the spoken word fades into obscurity.

Like a Medusa, with the power to turn the living into stone, the improvisatrice not only transforms herself into art by painting herself as Ariadne, but freezes Lorenzo into a kind of statue. Following her death he is described as a sculpture living amongst memorials to his lost love:

His brow, as sculpture beautiful,  
 Was wan as Griefs corroded page,  
 He had no words, he had no smiles,  
 No hopes: his sole employ to brood  
 Silently over his sick heart  
 In sorrow and in solitude.  
 I saw the hall where, day by day,  
 He mused his weary life away ;  
 It scarcely seemed a place for woe,  
 But rather like a genie's home.  
 Around were graceful statues ranged,  
 And pictures shone around the dome.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. by Ellen Frothingham (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887).

<sup>118</sup> L.E.L. 'The Improvisatrice', p. 103, Lines 1539-1550.

Unlike in de Staël's novel, it is never suggested that the improvisatrice's work is a problem, constituting a bar to domestic happiness. Lorenzo does love her, but had felt duty-bound to leave in order to honour his promise to marry another woman, even though he only cares for his intended bride as a sister. Young, fair, and frail, his new wife dies soon after their marriage, leaving him free to return to the woman he truly loves, only to find her dying. The heart-broken Lorenzo memorializes 'his minstrel love' by having her painted as Sappho in the throes of poetic inspiration, her cloud of raven hair crowned with a laurel wreath. As Lorenzo is frozen into sculpture through words, the improvisatrice is visually fixed as Sappho. However, Behrendt notes the difference between Landon's improvisatrice and her predecessors: 'Landon's improvisatrice is neither some prophetic exile speaking for her nation, as Corinne is, nor a despondent suicidal lyrical exile like Sappho.'<sup>119</sup> She simply fades away under the misapprehension that her lover has married another, yet this complex interplay, whereby this portrait simultaneously represents the improvisatrice and Sappho, without fully capturing either referent, does serve to promote the sister arts ideal.

Lessing may have famously differentiated between poetry and the plastic arts by stating that you cannot hear the statue of the Laocoön scream,<sup>120</sup> but this painting comes as close to poetry as possible: 'The lips were opening with such life, | You almost heard the silvery words.'<sup>121</sup> The beholder is tantalisingly close to hearing her words as if she lived again, and yet the word 'almost' remains the flaw in the *ut pictura poesis* argument. If she is absent, then so are her words. Landon appeals to the *ut pictura poesis* tradition to attest to her improvisatrice's skill as both a poet and a painter, but follows Lessing in addressing the limits of each art form.

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<sup>119</sup> Behrendt, 'This Is Not an Improvisation', p. 291.

<sup>120</sup> Lessing, *Laocoön*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>121</sup> L.E.L. 'The Improvisatrice', p. 104, Lines 1565-1566.

Proposing that the ekphrastic descriptions of paintings function similarly to the embedded ‘improvisations’, Behrendt argues that they both constitute textual representations of art which are never actually present, only described. As a consequence, ‘Landon’s poem reveals the fundamental incompatibility of ostensibly improvisational literary production with the actual performative nature of improvisation.’<sup>122</sup> However, this deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the artistic process does put poetry and painting on an equal footing. Rather than present a competitive paragone, the arts intersect as supportive sister arts, with painting employed to do what poetry cannot. For example, whilst Lorenzo is frozen in a death-like existence and cannot speak, the image of his lost love appears so life-like it seems poised to extemporize. The visual memorialization of the improvisatrice as Sappho can, therefore, preserve the memory of their love:

A Sappho, or ere love had turned  
 The heart to stone where once it burned.  
 But by the picture's side was placed  
 A funeral urn, on which was traced  
 The heart's recorded wretchedness ;  
 And on a tablet, hung above,  
 Was 'graved one tribute of sad words  
 ‘LORENZO TO HIS MINSTREL LOVE.’<sup>123</sup>

With the poem ending with the inscription: ‘LORENZO TO HIS MINSTREL LOVE.’, the practice of engraving transforms transient words into a lasting visual record. Although this blend of word and image works to reconcile the sister arts, the engraving recalls the stone pedestal of Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ (1818), inscribed with the words: ‘Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!’<sup>124</sup> Once intended to instil fear, the tone becomes ironic in application to crumbling ruins, showing the instability of meaning over time. In Landon’s

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<sup>122</sup> Behrendt, ‘This Is Not an Improvisation’, p. 284.

<sup>123</sup> L.E.L. ‘The Improvisatrice’, p. 105, Lines 1571-1578.

<sup>124</sup> [Percy Bysshe Shelley], ‘Glirastes’, ‘Original Poetry. Ozymandias’, *The Examiner, A Sunday Paper, on politics, domestic economy and theatricals for the year 1818* (London: John Hunt, January 1818), p. 24.

poem the improvisatrice herself remains nameless, and with her memory dependent on Lorenzo's commission, there is potential for her identity to be subsumed by that of Sappho.

Discussing the problematic position of Lorenzo in the poem, Margot K. Louis suggests that although 'his beloved is reduced to an artefact in his possession', [...] 'we might say that he is reduced to a mere voiceless appurtenance of her image.'<sup>125</sup> That said, he does get the last word: it is his inscription and he controls her image. However, this is a poem about a woman poet written by a fellow woman poet. Privileging a woman's words, the artist heroine is characterized as an improvisatrice rather than a painter. Furthermore, the primacy of the poem sees it as the lasting written record used to contain ekphrastic descriptions of visual art.

Despite its paradoxical existence, the improvisatrice's poem is a monument to her life in itself, as well as to those women who came before her. With poetry's capacity to include multiple voices, comparison is fostered between the women artists and poets evoked who have faced similar problems through the ages in terms of unrequited affection, the ephemeral nature of their work, and the risk of being forgotten. The improvisatrice's embedded narratives, as well as her ekphrastic descriptions of paintings, work to replicate the oral tradition. Passing down the stories of women's lives invites comparison whilst taking the content beyond self-pity by ventriloquizing universal sentiment. In 'Lessing's Laokoon and the Rhetoric of Pain' (2005), Tim Mehigan accounts for the differences between poetry and the plastic arts in terms of ethics. Whilst the visual arts aim to represent eternal beauty, poetry has an ethical drive, which makes the poet more willing and able to confront pain.<sup>126</sup> The

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<sup>125</sup> Margot K. Louis, 'Enlarging the Heart: L.E.L.'s "The Improvisatrice," Hemans's "Properzia Rossi", and Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26.1 (1998), 1-17 (p. 8).

<sup>126</sup> Tim Mehigan, 'Lessing's Laokoon and the Rhetoric of Pain', *Double Dialogues: Anatomy & Poetics*, 6 (Winter 2005) [Online]: <<http://www.doubledialogues.com/article/lessings-laokoon-and-the-rhetoric-of-pain/>> [accessed 10/01/19]. Percy Bysshe Shelley argues the case for the primacy of language and the ethical impulse of poetry in 'A Defence of Poetry' (1840).

work is not just heteroglossic in terms of embedded voices, but in the combination of word and image within the ekphrastic dimension. Given that the image can *speak* in a way that the improvisatrice cannot, the superiority of form is not resolved. The constant interplay between what art and poetry can or cannot capture serves to illustrate the similarities and the differences between the poet, the improvisatrice narrator, and the women depicted, including Ariadne and Sappho. The chain of women's experience articulated, therefore, provokes speculation regarding Landon's personal life at the same time as the advertisement for the poem worked to resist any similarities.

In spite of her attempts to distance herself from the melancholic, abandoned women of her poetry, Landon's posthumous reputation has been shaped by the controversy surrounding her death. In an episode with all the trappings of a Gothic novel, Landon had emigrated to Africa 1838, following her marriage to George Maclean, who was governor of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). However, her subsequent demise in an isolated castle remains shrouded in mystery. Only a matter of months into her marriage she was found dead, holding a bottle of prussic acid in her hand. Whether her death was murder, suicide, or a tragic accident is unknown, but Julian North reads the biographies written and published by friends of Landon, including Emma Roberts and Laman Blanchard, as attempts to combat rumours of suicide by emphasizing the difference between Landon, the woman, and L.E.L., the poet.<sup>127</sup>

The biographical sketch prefacing Roberts's edition of Landon's *The Zenana* suggested that she wrote of emotions she had not personally experienced: 'While generally supposed to be the pining victim of unrequited love, her heart remained untouched, its overflowing tenderness being lavished upon the faithless heroes of her own creation.'<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Julian North, 'The Female Poet: The AfterLives of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon', *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 191-226 (p. 217).

<sup>128</sup> Emma Roberts (ed.), *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L. With a Memoir by Emma Roberts* (London: Fisher and Sons; Paris: Quai D'École, 1839), pp. 9-11.

Laman Blanchard followed suit: ‘there was not the remotest connection or affinity, not indeed a colour of resemblance, between her every-day life or habitual feelings, and the shapes they were to assume in her poetry.’<sup>129</sup> Emphasizing the idea that her melancholic poems were not the product of a melancholy temperament, he argued that: ‘Sorrow and suspicion, pining regrets for the past, anguish for the present, and morbid predictions for the future, were, in L.E.L., not moral characteristics, but merely literary resources.’<sup>130</sup> Instead, he separated her authorial persona as a melancholy poetess as a type of performance, claiming: ‘No two persons could be less like each other in all that related to the contemplation of the actual world, than ‘L.E.L.’ and Letitia Landon.’<sup>131</sup> Julian North’s study of Landon’s literary legacy presents her death as the inevitable destruction of the melancholy Romantic poet, who abandons the domestic sphere for an exotic life indulging the imagination.<sup>132</sup> Angela Leighton suggests that ‘whatever the true facts’, Landon’s life ‘disturbingly and quite shockingly reinforced the conclusions of the Sappho-Corinne myth’.<sup>133</sup> Leighton’s conclusion sees no reconciliation between a woman’s home life and professional success: ‘Whether or not Letitia killed herself, the shady and much publicised nature of her end only intensified the punishing moral which lies at the core of the myth. Women’s creative success leads to moral and domestic disaster.’<sup>134</sup> However, Landon was at least praised in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* for her contribution to an appropriate domain of women’s poetry in writing of love.

The same review which unreservedly praised Landon, lambasted Felicia Hemans for engaging with intellectual debate: ‘What a pretty botchery Mrs Hemans, clever and brilliant as indeed she is, has made of it, when she takes upon herself to depict the awful fall of the

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<sup>129</sup> Laman Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, 2 Vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), p. 34.

<sup>130</sup> Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, p. 38.

<sup>131</sup> Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, p. 34.

<sup>132</sup> Julian North, ‘The Female Poet: The AfterLives of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon’, *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 191-226 (pp. 224-25).

<sup>133</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 57.

<sup>134</sup> Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, p. 57.

Caesars, in the breach of the last wall of Byzantium!’<sup>135</sup> Hemans dared to present aesthetic and political thought in poems such as ‘The Restoration of Works of Art in Italy’ (1816). Taking her literary concerns beyond the confines of hearth and home, Michael T. Williamson observes that Hemans’s intellectual engagement with figures such as Winckelmann extends her work beyond the domestic sphere.<sup>136</sup>

Despite this review, Hemans still managed to cultivate an image of acceptable femininity which saw George Virtue appropriate her name for a conduct book entitled *Mrs. Hemans’ Young Woman’s Companion*, reprinted well into the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Francis Jeffrey praised her ‘female poetry’ in *The Edinburgh Review*. Jeffrey’s review of Hemans’s 1828 collection, *Records of Women*, presents an essentialist view of women poets, treating ‘female poetry’ as a distinct entity: ‘Women, we fear, cannot do every thing; nor even every thing they attempt. But what they can do, they can do, they do, for the most part, excellently.’<sup>137</sup> Declaring Hemans’s work ‘a fine exemplification of Female Poetry’, this opening preamble serves to justify his admiration of Hemans as a ‘female poet’. For Jeffrey, exemplary ‘female poetry’ is *sweet, elegant, tender, harmonious, and uniform, not exaggerated or overpowering*: ‘It may not be the best imaginable poetry, and may not indicate the very highest or most commanding genius; but it embraces a great deal of that which gives the very best poetry its chief power of pleasing.’<sup>138</sup> Women, according to Jeffrey, are unable to represent the passions of men, being impatient and too quick to judge, as well as ignorant on topics such as business and politics: ‘Their proper and natural business is the

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<sup>135</sup> Anon, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, p. 190.

<sup>136</sup> Michael T. Williamson, ‘Felicia Hemans’s Public Poetry, Winckelmann’s History of the Art of Antiquity and the Imaginative Plentitude of the Victory Ode’, *Women’s Writing*, 21.1: Beyond Domesticity: Felicia Hemans in the Wider World, ed. by Kate Singer and Nanora Sweet (January 2014), 25-40 (p. 26).

<sup>137</sup> Francis Jeffrey, ‘Art II: I. *Records of Women: with other Poems*. By Felicia Hemans’, *The Edinburgh Review, Or Critical Journal*, Vol. L: October 1829-January 1830 (Edinburgh: Adam Black; London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), pp. 32-47 (p. 32).

<sup>138</sup> Jeffrey, *The Edinburgh Review*, p. 34.

practical regulation of private life.’<sup>139</sup> Similarly, it is suggested that men could not represent what women can, Jeffrey citing Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* as a text stamped with ‘the genius of her sex’.<sup>140</sup> Whilst the *Corinne* myth does deal with female experience, that is not to say that the struggles of a woman artist do not speak to wider political concerns. Like Landon, Hemans embraces female figures with literary, mythological, or historical precedent, but, combatting the essentialist view that one woman can stand for all women, the process of replication furthers the conversation as one woman writer responds to another. Furthermore, Hemans plays on the ambiguity of voices and employs paratextual framing devices to question the balance between a woman’s domestic and professional life, as most notably seen in the poems ‘*Corinne at the Capitol*’ and ‘*Properzia Rossi*’, which will form the focus of my analysis in the closing sections of this chapter.

### **Felicia Hemans and Female Experience**

Born Felicia Dorothea Browne in 1793, Hemans displayed an early talent for language, perhaps inspired by the cosmopolitan surrounds of Liverpool, where her grandfather and father served terms as Tuscan and Imperial Consul. She was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portugese, as well as Latin, and would later teach herself German. She began writing poetry at the age of eight, and was a published poet by 15, attracting the attention of Percy Shelley, whose correspondence was discouraged by her mother. Hemans’s precocious talent was no doubt aided by her apparently photographic memory; her sister recording that even in later life she enjoyed reciting long passages from memory, ‘repeating to herself whole chapters of the Bible, and page after page of Milton and Wordsworth.’<sup>141</sup> Recalling

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<sup>139</sup> Jeffrey, *The Edinburgh Review*, p. 32.

<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey, *The Edinburgh Review*, p. 34.

<sup>141</sup> See *The Works of Mrs Hemans: with a Memoir of Her Life by Her Sister*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Son; London: Thomas Cadell, 1839), p. 301.

Julia Osborne in Jewsbury's 'The History of an Enthusiast', one of Hemans's happiest childhood memories was climbing an apple tree to sit and read Shakespeare. When she met and fell in love with Captain Alfred Hemans, her burgeoning career was not halted; in the first six years of their marriage she gave birth to five sons whilst continuing to publish works including: *The Restoration of Works of Art in Italy* (1816), *Modern Greece* (1817), and *Translations from Camoens and Other Poets* (1818). Hemans showed that a woman could combine domestic life with a literary career, even if she did struggle to find time alone to write. Abandoned by her husband whilst pregnant with their fifth child, Hemans relied on her pen to support her family, but this inevitably led to the concern that she was sacrificing her art for profit. In spite of personal difficulties, Hemans retained her reputation as an exemplary female; her sentimental, patriotic poems securing her standing, with her work widely read and deemed suitable for school children. However, Hemans remained concerned with the female experience, particularly in terms of the fate of the woman artist and the abandoned woman, identifying with figures such as Sappho and Ariadne, as well as de Staël's Corinne and the sculptor, Properzia De' Rossi.

### **'C'est Moi': Hemans's Response to de Staël in 'Corinne at the Capitol'**

Felicia Hemans was inspired to write her poem 'Corinne at the Capitol' after seeing so much of herself in de Staël's heroine. Sending the 'dernier chant de Corinne' that her cousin might compare it with 'Corinne at the Capitol' she confesses: 'you will see that all the beauty and loftiness of the thoughts belong to Madame de Staël.'<sup>142</sup> Hemans's sense of affinity is so strong she describes the effect of reading *Corinne* in terms of looking into a mirror:

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<sup>142</sup> Felicia Hemans, Letter to ? [1828?], quoted in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), pp.431-32.

That book, in particular towards its close, has a power over me which is quite indescribable; some passages seem to give me back my own thoughts and feelings, my whole inner being, with a mirror, more true than ever friend could hold up.<sup>143</sup>

Hemans even annotated her copy, writing ‘C’est moi’<sup>144</sup> in the margins to highlight a particular passage in Chapter Three detailing Corinne’s suffering: ‘The strongest of my faculties is the capacity for suffering.’ Hemans quoted more of Corinne’s words on suffering in a letter to Jewsbury: ‘Souls to whom imagination gives the power to love and suffer – are they not exiles from another world?’<sup>145</sup> Hemans felt her personal experience proved de Staël right: ‘My very suffering proves it – for how much of this is occasioned by quenchless aspirations after intellectual and moral beauty, never to be found on earth!’<sup>146</sup> Appearing to share Jewsbury’s sentiments as expressed in ‘The History of an Enthusiast’, Hemans articulates the danger of living for praise: ‘Of all things, never may I become that despicable thing, a woman living upon admiration! The village matron, *tidying up* for her husband and children at evening, is far, far more enviable and respectable.’<sup>147</sup> Hemans’s poetic response to *Corinne*, therefore, provides the opportunity to air her own worries regarding the reconciliation of the woman writer as a domestic figure.

Conservative readings of the poem suggest that Hemans resolves ‘Corinne at the Capitol’ in favour of a happy home, with the narrator appearing to promote domestic life as the route to a woman’s happiness in the final stanza of the poem:

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<sup>143</sup> Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, p. 432.

<sup>144</sup> Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, see Gary Kelly’s footnote to p. 432.

<sup>145</sup> Felicia Hemans, Letter to Maria Jane Jewsbury [1828?], Gary Kelly’s translation quoted in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), p.433.

<sup>146</sup> Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, p. 432.

<sup>147</sup> Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, p. 433.

Radiant daughter of the sun!  
 Now thy living wreath is won.  
 Crown'd of Rome!—Oh! art thou not  
 Happy in that glorious lot?—  
 Happier, happier far than thou,  
 With the laurel on thy brow,  
 She that makes the humblest hearth  
 Lovely but to one on earth!<sup>148</sup>

Whilst there is not an answer to the question ‘art thou not | Happy in that glorious lot?’ from Corinne herself, enjambement sees the line end on ‘not’, suggesting a negative response. However, personal happiness is not the aim of the poet. As a public figure speaking for the nation, the poet has loftier aims. Madame de Staël outlined the problem with personal ambition in *The Influence of the Passions* (1796):

With every kind of personal ambition, women’s happiness is the loser. When women are trying to please simply in order to be loved, when this sweet hope is the only motive for their actions, they are concerned with perfecting themselves rather than showing themselves, with moulding their minds for one man’s happiness rather than for universal admiration.<sup>149</sup>

The overriding message is that a woman should not be motivated to create in order to win the affection of one man. This misguided personal aim is what leads to unhappiness. It is significant that Hemans uses the following quotation from *The Influence of the Passions* as an epigraph to ‘Corinne at the Capitol’: ‘Les femmes doivent penser qu’il est dans cette carrière bien peu de sorte qui puissent valoir la plus obscure vie d’une femme aimée et d’une mère heureuse.’<sup>150</sup> This paratextual framing device does appear to privilege ‘the obscure life of a beloved wife and happy mother’ as being more worthy than any career. However, Gary Kelly

<sup>148</sup> Felicia Hemans, ‘Corinne at the Capitol’, in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), pp.355-57 (p. 357, VII, Lines 41-48).

<sup>149</sup> Germaine de Staël, ‘The Influence of the Passions’, in *An Extraordinary Woman: Selected Writings of Germaine de Staël*, trans. by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 151-71 (p. 160).

<sup>150</sup> Hemans, ‘Corinne at the Capitol’, p. 355, this epigraph translates as: ‘Women ought to realize that in this career there is very little that can equal in value the most obscure life of a beloved wife and a happy mother.’

suggests that Hemans misquotes de Staël in this instance.<sup>151</sup> Placing the quotation back in its wider context, de Staël makes the case that personal happiness is not the point of literary genius. There are higher aims:

Before women begin a glorious career, whether aimed at Caesar's throne or the crown of literary genius, they must realize that to gain this glory they have to renounce the happiness and peace of the destiny of their sex – and that in this career there are very few fates which are worth the most obscure life of a beloved wife and happy mother.<sup>152</sup>

Hemans's knowledge and admiration of de Staël's works suggests that the quotation could have been purposefully truncated for use as an epigraph to 'Corinne at the Capitol' in order to frame the poem as a response to the prevalent critique of Corinne's 'unfeminine' behaviour, and her own authorial anxieties, before opening up the debate with the direct question, 'art thou not | Happy in that glorious lot?', posed to Corinne at the end of the poem. The paratextual framing of Hemans's poem 'Properzia Rossi' also questions the motivation behind women's art.

### **Re-framing Female Experience in 'Properzia Rossi'**

As noted in the previous chapter, the Italian sculptor Properzia De' Rossi (1490-1530) was one of only four women included in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, and the only one to be granted her own *Vita*. Although this distinction marks her out for praise, with Vasari describing her small carvings cut from peach pits as 'miraculous', the biography also highlights her unsuitability for the role of an artist as a woman. Vasari recounts the apocryphal story that Rossi struggled with melancholia as a consequence of her unrequited love for a nobleman named Anton Galeazzo Malvasia, suggesting that her work was auto-

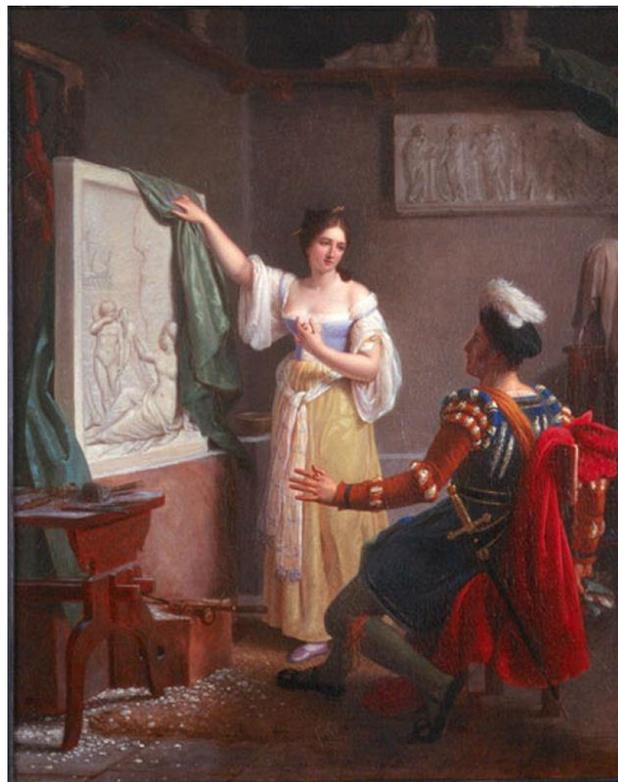
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<sup>151</sup> Gary Kelly (ed.), *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), footnote to p. 355.

<sup>152</sup> De Staël, 'The Influence of the Passions', p. 162.

biographical. As noted by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella: ‘while male artists execute works without regard to their personal feelings throughout the *Lives*, Vasari seems unable to imagine a woman creating a work of art without sentimental or romantic inspiration.’<sup>153</sup> What is more, she is described as showing little inclination to produce more work once ‘she had expressed her own most burning passion’.<sup>154</sup>

Louis Ducis’s painting *Properzia de Rossi Finishing her Last Bas-relief* (1822), dramatizes the artist unveiling depiction of the abandoned Ariadne to the object of her affection. Her hand lingers over her heart as she looks for his love and approval.



**Figure. 5.2:** Louis Ducis, *Properzia de Rossi Finishing her Last Bas-relief* (1822), Musée de l'Évêché de Limoges (Wikimedia Commons).

<sup>153</sup> Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (eds.), Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 565.

<sup>154</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, p. 341.

Felicia Hemans takes this image as the starting point for her poem 'Properzia Rossi', referring to the painting in a paratextual introduction to her work:

Properzia Rossi, a celebrated female sculptor of Bologna, possessed also of talents for poetry and music, died in consequence of an unrequited attachment. – A painting, by Ducis, represents her showing her last work, a basso-relievo of Ariadne, to a Roman Knight, the object of her affection, who regards it with indifference.<sup>155</sup>

Like a display card placed alongside a painting in a gallery, this biographical note provides the context for the poem, suggesting that the reader may not be familiar with the sculptor despite her prodigious talents. This authoritative voice, presenting the basic 'facts' of Rossi's life, is not simply a helpful supplement. Kathleen Lundeen notes a potential downside to Hemans's practice of framing her work in this way: 'When she prefaces her poetry with the words of historians, philosophers, scientists, novelists, and/or fellow poets, she allows them to step in front of her and set the agenda for what follows.'<sup>156</sup> If the paratext is the frame, Rossi's first person experience is the picture. As Gary Kelly argues of Hemans's practice of framing her poetry with prose prefaces in *Historic Scenes*: 'The verse narrative and the feminized experience it represents and valorizes are at the centre; the supposedly authoritative and authorizing discourses of fact and literature (here, mostly by male writers) are marginalized.'<sup>157</sup> However, the introductory supplement inevitably shapes how the reader views the ensuing narrative, but this is not necessarily a 'downside' so much as a critique by Hemans of the legacy of women artists in the hands of men.

G rard Genette contends the secondary status of peripheral, paratextual material by suggesting that a paratext serves to present a text, effectively ensuring its very presence:

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<sup>155</sup> Felicia Hemans, 'Properzia Rossi', in *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), pp. 323-27 (p. 323).

<sup>156</sup> Kathleen Lundeen, 'Hemans' Response to the Romantic Uni-verse', *Working With English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama*, 4.1: *The Romantic-Period Paratext*, ed. by Ourania Chatsiou (2008), 57-69 (p. 57).

<sup>157</sup> Gary Kelly, 'Introduction' to *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters* (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 30.

although we do not always know whether [paratexts] are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world.<sup>158</sup>

Extending this idea, it is the male framing narratives from the likes of Vasari and Ducis which have, thus far, shaped Rossi's legacy. Here they provide the pre-existing context for Hemans to step in and reclaim the narrative and give the female voice presence. This is a truthful voice of first-hand experience, unlike either the epigraphic headnote or Ducis's painting itself, which present subtly different scenarios. Far from the 'indifference' described in the paratextual headnote, Ducis's knight shows animated surprise, or possibly even delight, in his admiration for the artwork, if not the artist herself. This miss-match illustrates the problem of securing an accurate legacy.

Grant F. Scott notes how Hemans 'engages with the artwork in ways that are powerfully affective, imagining herself into the immediate human context of the represented scene.'<sup>159</sup> For Scott, taking art out of the gallery context to focus on production rather than the finished object has the consequence of 'reducing the male observer to the role of speechless onlooker.'<sup>160</sup> Marking a shift in tone from 'The Restoration of Works of Art in Italy' (1816), Scott suggests that in 'Properzia Rossi' (1828) 'we move from the national to the personal level, from a rhetoric of political and public advocacy to a voice of intense private feeling.'<sup>161</sup> However, the poem is still political in that the private feeling described is more than a personal lament.

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<sup>158</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>159</sup> Grant F. Scott, 'The Fragile Image: Felicia Hemans and Romantic Ekphrasis', in *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 36-54 (p. 37).

<sup>160</sup> Scott, 'The Fragile Image', p. 37.

<sup>161</sup> Scott, 'The Fragile Image', p. 41.

Moving on to the poetic epigraph, this stanza preceding the main four sections of the poem can be seen as an answer to ‘Corinne at the Capitol’. However, the voice is ambiguous in that the sentiment could as easily apply to Rossi or Hemans. The epigraph, therefore, constitutes a universal cry from the woman artist lamenting unrequited love and the transience of fame:

----- Tell me no more, no more  
 Of my soul’s lofty gifts! Are they not vain  
 To quench its haunting thirst for happiness?  
 Have I not lov’d, and striven, and fail’d to bind  
 One true heart unto me, whereon my own  
 Might find a resting-place. A home for all  
 Its burden of affections? O depart  
 Unknown, tho’ Fame goes with me; I must leave  
 The earth unknown. Yet it may be that death  
 Shall give my name a power to win such tears  
 As would have made life precious.<sup>162</sup>

The layering of voices continues in the switch to Rossi’s first person account of sculpting Ariadne. Patricia Pulham comments on the relationship between Hemans, Rossi, and Ariadne in terms of that of an artist and their muse, describing how Hemans feminizes ‘the muse-artist relationship through a series of displacements – Ariadne as a muse to Rossi’s sculptor; Rossi as a muse to Hemans’s poet’.<sup>163</sup> In doing so, Pulham proposes that ‘Hemans foreshadows the possibility of a woman artist who is, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Aurora Leigh, ‘Simultaneously poet and muse’.<sup>164</sup> The blended layering of abandoned women as Hemans writes of Rossi carving Ariadne, creates a *mise en abyme*. Rather than present an ever-repeating scenario, the changing landscape of each generation enables writers and artists to build upon the narratives of their forbears. Helen Luu responds to the essentialist critique that such repetition means that one woman can stand for all by describing the contest of voices in

<sup>162</sup> Hemans, ‘Properzia Rossi’, p. 323, Lines 1-11.

<sup>163</sup> Patricia Pulham, ‘Marmoreal Sisterhoods: Classical Statuary in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 22 (2016), 1-29 (p. 9).

<sup>164</sup> Pulham. ‘Marmoreal Sisterhoods’, p. 9.

the poem as refraction, not reflection.<sup>165</sup> Luu's idea of 'refraction' shows that shared sentiment can work to increase the perceived cultural value of the poetry, taking the content beyond a personal outpouring of emotion without necessarily promoting essentialism. There is similarity as well as difference between the poet and her subject.

Where an artist/muse relationship always suggests an imbalance of power, the sister arts tradition provides a more balanced picture of the relationships in Hemans's work. Pulham concedes that: 'In drawing attention to Rossi as a poet as well as a sculptor, Hemans tacitly asks us to think of her talents in relation to Rossi's own, thus constructing herself as a sculptor poet whose artworks are thoughts shaped and carved in language.'<sup>166</sup> 'While the *paragone* or rivalry between the arts becomes a fixture of Romantic ekphrasis', Scott notes that 'here it is the amicability of the sister arts that prevails, as Hemans consciously downplays the distinctions between poet, sculptor, and artwork.'<sup>167</sup> In promoting 'a sister arts kinship between an English poetess and an Italian female sculptor praised by Vasari',<sup>168</sup> Michelle Martinez proposes that Hemans's poetry problematizes the gender division of arts. The reciprocal relationship effectively works to raise the status of each form; sculpture provides a lasting public monument but the manual labour required to produce it prioritizes the body over the mind. When the poet *carves* with their mind, sculpture is raised to a liberal art, whilst the poet's words gain civic importance for posterity:

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<sup>165</sup> Helen Luu, 'Fantasies of "Woman": Hemans's Deconstruction of "Femininity" in *Records of Woman*', *Women's Writing*, 21.1: Beyond Domesticity: Felicia Hemans in the Wider World, ed. by Kate Singer and Nanora Sweet (January 2014), 41-57 (p. 49).

<sup>166</sup> Pulham, 'Marmoreal Sisterhoods', p. 7.

<sup>167</sup> Scott, 'The Fragile Image', p. 42.

<sup>168</sup> Michelle Martinez, 'Poets and the Sister Arts in Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Poetry*, 41.4: Whither Victorian Poetry? (Winter 2003), 621-28 (p. 623).

The bright work grows  
 Beneath my hand, unfolding, as a rose  
 Leaf by leaf, to beauty – line by line,  
 Through the pale marble's veins. It grows! – and now  
 I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine:  
 I give my own life's history to thy brow,  
 Forsaken Ariadne! – thou shalt wear  
 My form, my lineaments; but oh! More fair,  
 Touched into lovelier being by the glow  
 Which in me dwells, as by the summer-light  
 All things are glorified [...].<sup>169</sup>

Peter Simonsen observes the pleasurable blend in terminology as Hemans puns on the word 'line': 'Hemans aligns poem and sculpture as she puns on the word "line" to denote the lines of sculpture, but certainly also the lines of verse inscribed on the white page.' In doing so it is evident that 'she not only saw the two art forms as mutually reinforcing sisters, but that for her, the sister arts were ideally carried out by sister artists.'<sup>170</sup> Sister artists, such as Hemans and Rossi, share the same dilemmas and limitations.

Pulham argues that Hemans presents the woman artist as a combination of Pygmalion and Aphrodite, in that the sculptor is able to breathe life into her work without the need to call upon divine intervention.<sup>171</sup> However, Rossi is not a Pygmalion figure in that she is not sculpting an ideal mate, but an idealized self in order to inspire the love she herself cannot. Instead, Rossi represents an inverse Galatea, with the woman turning herself into a sculpture, rather than the sculpture being transformed into a woman. This reversal reveals the paradoxical difficulty a woman artist faces in living up to her work whilst at the same time being deemed inseparable from her creation.

As an ekphrastic poem of artistic creation, depicting the process rather than product, Rossi pours her emotion into the statue in the hope the artwork will provoke the tears of her

<sup>169</sup> Hemans, 'Properzia Rossi', pp. 324-25, II, Lines 32-42.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Simonsen, 'Late Romantic Ekphrasis: Felicia Hemans, Leigh Hunt and the Return of the Visible', *Orbis Litterarum*, 60 (2005), 317-43 (p. 332).

<sup>171</sup> Pulham, 'Marmoreal Sisterhoods', p. 9.

unrequited love even if she cannot. With the sculpture intended as an object of torment, the Ariadne can be compared to Juliet in *Corinne*, who is ‘moulded’ to resemble her abandoned aunt. Although Rossi entreats her art to speak for her, the limits of sculpture are revealed through the impossibility for it to contain her voice:

Speak to him, lorn one! deeply, mournfully.  
Of all my love and grief! Oh! Could I throw  
Into thy frame a voice, a sweet, and low,  
And thrilling voice of song! when he came nigh.  
To send the passion of its melody  
Thro’ his pierc’d bosom – on its tones to bear  
My life’s deep feeling, as the southern air<sup>172</sup>

Whilst on the surface ‘Properzia Rossi’ is a poem about art produced out of unrequited love, it more importantly works to raise the status of women’s work through engagement with the sister arts. The poem actually ends before the knight’s reaction is given. The line “‘Twas hers who loved me well”<sup>173</sup> is only a ventriloquized imagining of his words. However, placing the male gaze at a step further removed, Scott reads this as Ariadne speaking to her creator.<sup>174</sup> Even so, Rossi achieves earthly fame, but not personal happiness. We have to look to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* to see how an artist’s focus on political action can break the cycle of despair, proving that societal change can lead to domestic contentment.

### **Reconciliation in *Aurora Leigh***

Published in 1856, *Aurora Leigh* lies beyond the timeframe of this study. Nevertheless, it is worth considering given that many critics, including Margot K. Louis, Ellen Peel, and Nanora Sweet, have noted the similarities between *Corinne* and *Aurora Leigh*: both women have a British father and an Italian mother, and see the poetic impulse as symptomatic of their

<sup>172</sup> Hemans, ‘Properzia Rossi’, p. 325, II, Lines 48-54.

<sup>173</sup> Hemans, ‘Properzia Rossi’, p. 327, IV, Line 128.

<sup>174</sup> Scott, ‘The Fragile Image’, p. 46.

motherland.<sup>175</sup> However, Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes a happy ending for her heroine. Where Ellen Moers complains that de Staël ends the novel ‘without attempting to resolve any of the cultural dilemmas which face the woman of genius’,<sup>176</sup> Barrett Browning provides the answer by reworking the narrative to give Aurora a successful career and fulfilling sexual union. Bringing the poem and novel forms together, Barrett Browning’s ‘novel in verse’, a nine book<sup>177</sup> epic poem in blank verse, represents the culmination of experimentation regarding how best to integrate the woman artist into British society. This is achieved by developing the Corinne myth in terms of the social problem novel.

Aurora initially refuses the hand of her cousin, Romney, on the basis that he criticizes her work, questioning her ability to change society through poetry. However, after choosing to leave and dedicate herself to writing great poetry, she struggles to create. As Louis observes, the ‘pose’ of a poet like Corinne isn’t productive; it is words and actions that matter: ‘When Aurora stops practicing a pose and works at writing and justifying poetry rather than at “being a poet”, her impact becomes both monumental and transformative.’<sup>178</sup> It is only with a reformed Romney that she recovers her creativity and is able to write within a happy marriage but, showing that love should not be the sole driving motive behind women’s art, her union with Romney is not the inspiration behind her work. Louis proposes two factors which enable Aurora to survive and thrive as a poet: ‘first, by treating her writing as a job rather than as the spontaneous outpouring of helpless emotion; second, by using her writing to communicate a vision which both includes and transcends her personal desires.’<sup>179</sup> Aurora

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<sup>175</sup> See Margot K. Louis, ‘Enlarging the Heart: L.E.L.’s “The Improvisatrice,” Hemans’s “Properzia Rossi” and Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26.1 (1998), 1-17; and Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet, ‘Corinne and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning’, *The Novel’s Seductions: Stael’s Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. by Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1999), pp. 204-20.

<sup>176</sup> Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 209.

<sup>177</sup> Replicating the number of sibylline books.

<sup>178</sup> Louis, ‘Enlarging the Heart’, p. 7.

<sup>179</sup> Louis, ‘Enlarging the Heart’, p. 4.

Leigh, thus, displays the poet's desire to exert moral social change and, in Percy Shelley's words, be ranked amongst 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'<sup>180</sup>

To look back to David Hume's ideas on social improvement quoted in Chapter One of this thesis, when 'both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner [...] it is impossible but they must feel an increase of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment.'<sup>181</sup> For Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the progress of improvement spreads beyond the confines of the immediate social gathering, with Aurora and Romney determined to work to improve society as a whole. However, Le Comte d'Angiviller, Directeur Général Des Bâtiments Du Roi, did not agree with Hume on the grounds of female modesty: 'Women cannot be useful to the progress of the arts because the modesty of their sex forbids them.'<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, he believed that the very presence of women would have a detrimental effect on the arts by exerting a corrupting influence upon their male contemporaries. According to Rousseau's *Emile*, women have modesty because they lack reason to curb their otherwise boundless passions.<sup>183</sup> As noted by Mary D. Sheriff, this means that where men are bestowed with reason, 'the gift necessary for cultural production', women have 'the restraint that effectively bars them from it.'<sup>184</sup> Rousseau particularly recommended against women painting portraits because of the seductive exchange of glances involved. However, in *Aurora Leigh*, it is significant that Romney loses his sight. In a narrative parallel with Charlotte Brontë's achievement of equality in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Romney, like Rochester, is blinded. Once freed from the male gaze, Aurora and Romney can come together as equals, and he can come to appreciate her words.

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<sup>180</sup> Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', p. 86.

<sup>181</sup> Hume, 'Of Refinement in the Arts', p. 278.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Mary D. Sheriff, 'The Im/modesty of her Sex: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Salon of 1783', in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. by Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 455-88 (p. 459).

<sup>183</sup> Rousseau, *Emilius*, p. 179.

<sup>184</sup> Sheriff, 'The Im/modesty of her Sex', p. 459. See Sheriff for a full discussion of the links between Rousseau and d'Angiviller.

Aurora Leigh does not replicate Barrett Browning's own path to literary fame, nor does the heroine physically resemble Barrett Browning. Such choices attempt to deflect direct comparisons being made between the poet and her artist heroine, severing the connection between a poet and their subject. This poem is not a personal lament, but a political manifesto. Critiquing an education based on fashionable accomplishments, such as wax flower modelling, Barrett Browning proves that women poets can drive social change, and shows how a woman can work to improve the nation, and enjoy a happy home life. Writing to Henry Fothergill Chorley in 1845, Elizabeth Barrett Browning lamented the lack of literary predecessors: 'I look everywhere for Grandmothers & see none.'<sup>185</sup> Differentiating the poet from mere versifiers, Barrett Browning questions why there have been no great women poets. Whilst the exploration of the woman poet in *Aurora Leigh* seeks to answer this question and present a new model, Barrett Browning achieves change through replication, with her heroine responding to, and building upon, the legacy of *Corinne*.

## Conclusions

A contributor writing under the name of 'Angelis' in *The Ladies' Monthly Museum* of May 1828 thought it necessary to correct the readers' impressions of Italian women promoted in novels, suggesting that 'In Italy, the destiny of the women is far from being brilliant.'<sup>186</sup> 'Angelis' cites Madame de Staël as one of the key perpetrators. The writer describes how the prevalent view of Italian women as a type has been shaped by Grand Tourists' encounters with the few women who perform publicly for travellers. These travellers do not see the domestic Italian woman who is naturally disposed to compose, but will ably balance this

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<sup>185</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Henry Fothergill Chorley, 7 January 1845, Letter 1809, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, Vol. X (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 2010), pp. 13-15 (p. 14), [online]: <<https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2048/?rsId=188192&returnPage=1>>[accessed 20/04/20]

<sup>186</sup> 'Angelis', 'The Women of Italy', *The Ladies' Monthly Museum, or, Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction*, Vol. 27: May 1828 (London: J. Robins & Co., 1828), pp. 273-80 (p. 273).

community amusement with raising her children and the running the family business. The article celebrates the many and varied achievements of Italian women in the arts and academia. Linking the progress of the arts, particularly women's art, with the progress of the nation, the writer looks forward to a time when Italian women can once again 'silence their detractors', exclaiming: 'What a triumph will it be for them to have employed the power of their charms for the regeneration of their country!'<sup>187</sup> Even though de Staël's outsider's perspective on the Italian woman artist is critiqued here, the chain of response generated by *Corinne* works to rehabilitate the artist as a figure to improve Britain as a nation. The consequences of looking back in order to look forward can be seen in Anne Bronte's reworking of Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) in her novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), which will be the subject of the epilogue to this thesis.

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<sup>187</sup> Angelis, *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*, p. 280.

## Epilogue

### Looking Back to Look Forward: Framing the Woman as an Artist in Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)

The palette and the easel, my darling playmates once, must be my sober toil-fellows now.

Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)<sup>1</sup>



Figure 6.1: Emily Mary Osborn, *Nameless and Friendless* "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, etc." - Proverbs, x, 15' (1857), Tate, London, Accession No. T12936, digital image © Tate, image released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported).

Dressed in black mourning clothes, a young woman nervously waits as a print seller appraises her work. An assistant turns from hanging a picture behind the counter to offer his

<sup>1</sup> Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by Stevie Davies (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 352.

opinion, whilst two male customers tear their attention away from an alluring print of a ballerina to leer at the spectacle of a woman artist attempting to sell her work. The woman's eyes are modestly cast down as she plays with a piece of string to distract herself from the penetrating gaze of the men surrounding her.

The scenario described is the subject painted by Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925) in a work entitled *Nameless and Friendless* (1857), but this is a familiar situation recalling the trials of the artist heroine in Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Accompanied by a young boy, who dutifully carries the artist's portfolio, it is suggested that the woman in black at the centre of Osborn's composition is reliant upon her art in order to support them both. Her folded umbrella, travelling cape, and muddy hem all contribute to the idea that she has travelled far; with no father or husband to turn to, or her name as an artist to recommend her, the woman artist truly is nameless and friendless.

Osborn's oil on canvas, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1857, replicates the scene in *Self-Control* (1811) in which the heroine, Laura Montreville, resorts to selling her artwork as a means of remedying her father's financial difficulties. Laura's attempts to sell her work by daring to visit a series of London print shops prove difficult, but she holds out for what she believes her art is worth. In alluding to Laura's plight, Osborn reveals that this representation of a woman artist remains relevant in the 1850s. Although Anne Brontë's artist heroine, Helen Huntingdon, avoids the public gaze of the print shop by sending her work to London via an intermediary, this choice in itself reveals a desire to distance herself from the aesthetic and erotic scrutiny associated with entering the commercial arena.

As this thesis has shown, the concern with women's professional engagement with the arts pre-dates the mid-nineteenth century, yet this era saw increased opportunities for women

to train and exhibit. The census records reveal an exponential rise in the number of women identifying as professional artists through the course of the nineteenth century; in the census of 1851, 548 women identified as professional artists, by 1861 the number had risen to 853, whilst the census of 1871 shows a total standing at 1,069.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing surge in artist heroine-centred novels during the nineteenth century included: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), Amelia Edward's *Barbara's History* (1856), Charlotte Yonge's *Pillars of the House* (1873), Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *Miss Angel* (1875), not to mention the works of George Sand and George Eliot. Whilst the artist heroine of the nineteenth-century novel has already attracted substantial critical attention, and is largely beyond the scope of this thesis, what remains to acknowledge is the way writers of this period refer back to the work of their predecessors. This epilogue will, therefore, analyse how Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* looks back to Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* in order to look forward in terms of 'the woman question'. As Antonia Losano has observed: 'Brontë's novel dramatizes the transition from amateur, accomplished woman to professional female artist – a historical transition that is in its earliest stages at precisely the moment of the writing and publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.'<sup>3</sup> Marking this moment of cultural change with the representation of a woman artist does not only serve to make a revolutionary case for women's rights in terms of employment; Brontë also raises the issues of property ownership and child custody tied to marriage and divorce law, given that Helen takes up her paintbrush to support herself and her child after leaving her abusive husband.

However radical this work may be, Brontë is indebted to earlier characterizations of the artist heroine, and the role of *Self-Control* as a source text for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has not been fully explored. Arguing that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* prioritizes the *feminist*

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics quoted in Antonia Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58.1 (June 2003), 1-41(p. 15).

<sup>3</sup> Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist', p. 5.

over the *artist* by focusing on the heroine's need for money rather than the desire for fame, Ellen Moers claims that Brontë 'may have been thinking more of the painter-heroine of Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811) than of Corinne.'<sup>4</sup> Yet, whilst Moers acknowledges that there is a comparison to be made, there has not been a sustained analysis of Brunton's influence on Brontë. *Self-Control* lies like a palimpsest beneath the text of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* representing a past which, though cannot be fully erased, can inform the future.

### ***Self-Control* as a Source Text**

Mary Brunton had begun writing *Self-Control* with no other aim than to amuse herself. Admitting that her only writing experience lay in the practical, domestic modes of penning letters or transcribing recipes, Brunton embarked on the project having 'scarcely formed any plan',<sup>5</sup> which perhaps explains the pacing of a lengthy, drawn-out novel which is rather hastily concluded. Although the work lacked planning, Brunton did have a wider aim in mind in terms of the message she wanted to convey. Writing to Joanna Baillie, to whom she had dedicated *Self-Control*, Brunton stated: 'I merely intended to shew the power of the religious principle in bestowing self-command; and to bear testimony against a maxim as immoral as indelicate, that a reformed rake makes the best husband.'<sup>6</sup> In seeking to get her novel published, Brunton could disseminate her didactic lesson and justify the time she had dedicated to her work: 'It is published that I may reconcile my conscience to the time which it has employed, by making it in some degree useful.'<sup>7</sup> The anxiety surrounding the need to

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen Moers, 'Performing Heroism: The Myth of Corinne', in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Jerome Hamilton Buckley (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 319-50 (p. 335).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Brunton, Letter to Joanna Baillie, March 1811, quoted by Alexander Brunton in the Memoir prefixed to Mary Brunton, *Emmeline; With Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller; Archibald Constable and Co.; London: John Murray, 1819), p. xlii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. xlii.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Brunton, 'Dedication' to *Self-Control* (London: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1986), p. v-vi. Unless otherwise stated, this edition of Brunton's novel will be cited throughout this chapter.

be useful is a trait Brunton transfers to her virtuous heroine, Laura Montreville, whose religious conviction guides her conduct:

In the character of Laura Montreville the religious principle is exhibited as rejecting the bribes of ambition; bestowing fortitude in want and sorrow; as restraining just displeasure; overcoming constitutional timidity; conquering misplaced affection; and triumphing over the fear of death and of disgrace.<sup>8</sup>

Anthony Mandal has described *Self-Control* as the ‘apotheosis’ of Regency period evangelical fiction,<sup>9</sup> but notes that it is a work full of contradictions: ‘In many ways, *Self-Control* is a brilliant mess.’<sup>10</sup> Laura is at once modest and daring; risking her reputation to work as an artist is a bold move even though she seeks an independent employment for the right reasons. Pre-empting criticism that her readers might find her heroine ‘unnatural’, Brunton uses her dedicatory preface to defend her characterization of Laura, proclaiming: ‘if my principle figure want the air, and vivacity of life, the blame lies in the painter, not the subject. Laura is indebted to fancy for her drapery and attitudes alone’.<sup>11</sup> Brunton insists the self-command displayed in Laura has real-life precedent, rather than being an idealized portrait. *The Monthly Review* duly recommended ‘this pleasing novel to all young people’, finding Laura’s ‘cheerful endurance’ worthy of emulation, but left it to the reader to decide whether they found Laura’s character wholly ‘natural’:

Whether Laura’s ‘self-control’ be perfectly natural is mere matter of opinion; and the decision depends, in a great measure, on the disposition of the reader: but it is a pardonable fault if a character, which is offered as a model, transcends those for whose emulation it is intended.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brunton, ‘Dedication’ to *Self-Control*, p. v.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Mandal, ‘Introduction’ to *Self-Control*, Chawton House Library Series (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p. xl.

<sup>10</sup> Mandal, ‘Introduction’ to *Self-Control*, p. xxxv.

<sup>11</sup> Brunton, ‘Dedication’ to *Self-Control*, p. vi.

<sup>12</sup> Anon, ‘Art. 23: *Self-Control*’, *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal*, Vol. LXV: May-August 1811 (London: Becket and Porter, 1811), pp. 434-35 (p 435).

The episode featuring Laura's abduction, passage to Canada, and subsequent escape in a canoe has provided a focal point for the ridicule levelled at Brunton, with Jane Austen one reader to find the whole novel rather improbable:

I am looking over *Self Control* again, & my opinion is confirmed of its' being an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of critical attention speaks of a preoccupation with Brunton's lack of skill as a writer; Margaret Bruce identifies Brunton as a writer whose 'literary talents were not quite equal to her artistic aspirations',<sup>14</sup> whilst Ann Jones argues that her work contains 'a combination of the interesting and promising with the clumsy, the sanctimonious, and the melodramatic'.<sup>15</sup> However, as Sarah Maitland attests, *Self-Control*'s significance lies in its portrayal of the woman artist: 'Brunton firmly defends women's financial independence and right to hard creative work, by making Laura not simply a painter, but one who risks public opprobrium and personal assault by going out into the streets to sell her work'.<sup>16</sup> It should also be remembered that *Self-Control* was a bestseller of its day. Tracing the text's publication history, Anthony Mandal has described how *Self-Control* continued to be reissued through the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Mandal is one of the critics leading a re-evaluation of Brunton's work in relation to other writers, including Jane Austen. Whilst Brunton's work shares many themes with Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which was published just six months later, *Self-Control*'s links to Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which illustrate this novel's more lasting influence, have yet to be analysed.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Austen, Letter to Cassandra Austen, 11 October 1813, in *The Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> M.H. Bruce, 'Mary Brunton (1778-1818): An Assessment', *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature*, 1 (1979), 1-15 (p. 14).

<sup>15</sup> A.H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Maitland, 'Introduction' to *Self-Control* (London: Pandora Mothers of the Novel, 1986), p. x-xi.

<sup>17</sup> See Anthony Mandal's Introduction to his Chawton House Library Series edition of *Self-Control* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), for details of the novel's publication history.

*Self-Control* follows the trials and tribulations faced by Laura Montreville as she attempts to overcome her feelings for the rakish Colonel Hargrave, who attempts to seduce her. Hargrave makes the mistake of not considering Laura worthy of becoming his wife. Although she is descended from aristocracy, her father was only a younger son, and made an imprudent match in rashly entering a marriage based on a passionate attachment. Living on a meagre income in a cottage in the Scottish highlands does not suit Laura's mother, and she slowly declines. Following her mother's death, Laura's father becomes anxious about how his daughter will survive in the event of his own demise and arranges for an annuity which fails to materialize. It is this situation which fuels Laura to turn to painting professionally. It is a chance encounter with a stranger, who appraises her art as though it is the work of a young male artist, which reassures her that her work has value. Having heard the connoisseur assign a monetary value to one of her paintings on display, she does not waiver in the belief that she has personal and professional worth. Significantly, Laura's work shows no gender specificity; her choice to paint historical subjects in oils raises the perceived status of her work from female accomplishment to the realm of male professionalism. Laura's talent progresses from painting copies from the Old Masters in the collection of a local landowner, to producing her own original compositions. These images are not the delicate flower paintings or watercolour landscapes expected of accomplished young girls, her subjects having included the Roman General, Scipio, and the Spartan warrior, Leonidas. The only way in which she confirms to the gender stereotype of the woman artist is that the model of masculine perfection informing her portrait of Leonidas betrays her attraction to Hargrave, whose relentless pursuit she virtuously resists.

Laura's determination to help her father by presenting him with her earnings sees her dedicate herself to her art; honing her skill before presenting her work to potential buyers. She feels no shame in venturing out into the unfamiliar streets of London to visit print sellers

even though her efforts meet rejection. Laura refuses to show her work to the first print seller she meets, after he leers at her and categorizes all women's work as 'vile daubs'.<sup>18</sup> The second dealer laments the modern date of the work and its lack of a famous name. The third criticizes her want of perspective and offers only five guineas, but Laura perseveres, holding out for what she thinks her work is worth. The fourth shop she visits is owned by a former artist who sees her talent, even if he cannot afford to buy the piece, and duly offers to exhibit it for her in the hope of attracting a buyer willing to pay whatever price she names. When Laura's work finally does find a buyer, it turns out to be her admirer, Montague De Courcy. Given this circumstance, Laura cannot be sure whether he values her work or if he just sees patronage as an opportunity to help a damsel in distress, with him having discovered her identity as the artist and heard of her plight from the dealer.

Although Laura is proud of her achievements, her father is not: 'Captain Montreville saw in his daughter's well-earned treasure only the wages of degrading toil'.<sup>19</sup> His ineffectual money management after making an unsuitable marriage has left them in this situation and he cannot bear to think of Laura having to work for a living, 'degraded into an artist'.<sup>20</sup> Laura argues that there is no shame in her independence, but her father's response questions whether she can ever truly be independent: 'you are quite mistaken in fancying yourself independent. Your boasted art depends upon the taste, the very caprice of the public for its reward.'<sup>21</sup> As depicted in *Nameless and Friendless*, the fate of the woman artist ultimately lies in the hands of male arbiters of taste.

The contradictions in Laura's nature can be seen in her willingness to risk her good character, even if her intentions are pure. However, this same impulse can be found in

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<sup>18</sup> Brunton, *Self-Control*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Brunton, *Self-Control*, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Brunton, *Self-Control*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> Brunton, *Self-Control*, pp. 102-03.

Brunton, who published despite not wanting to be seen as a ‘literary woman’. With the benefit of hindsight, Brunton had lamented her choice: ‘if, before *Self-Control* went to press, I could have guessed it would be traced to me, I would certainly have put it in the fire.’<sup>22</sup> As noted earlier in this thesis, Brunton’s concern regarding the status of literary women actually pre-dated the publication of her first novel:

To be pointed at – to be noticed and commented upon – to be suspected of literary airs – to be shunned as literary women are, by the more unpretending of my own sex; and abhorred, as literary women are, by the more pretending of the other! My dear, I would sooner exhibit as a rope-dancer.<sup>23</sup>

In *Self-Control*, Laura’s talent combined with her self-command serves to protect her. However, the danger of artistic accomplishment is revealed through the story of her landlady’s daughter, Julia, who had been taught to paint in the hope that she would be able to earn a living as an artist. However, her skill had only attracted a young ensign, with whom she subsequently eloped. Facing a similar situation with Hargrave, Laura has to remain resolute in the lesson that the surface beauty she has seen and painted does not always hold the deeper qualities of a masculine ideal. The idea that art is biographical and has the power to reveal a hidden desire is returned to when Laura paints an image of Hercules which resembles Montague De Courcy. Although Laura resists this reading by presenting it as a friendship portrait to his sister, Hargrave flies into a rage when he discovers her preparatory sketches, assuming that De Courcy must have usurped him as her lover. Recalling Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline*, analysed in Chapter Two of this thesis, the male gaze all too frequently assumes such a biographical reading without further evidence. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Brunton, Letter to Mrs Craigie, 1813, quoted by Alexander Brunton in the Memoir prefixed to Mary Brunton, *Emmeline; With Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners & Miller, and Constable and Co.; and London: John Murray, 1819), p. lxxi.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Brunton, Letter to Eliza Izett, 30 August 1810, quoted by Alexander Brunton in the Memoir prefixed to Mary Brunton, *Emmeline; With Some Other Pieces* (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller; Archibald Constable and Co.; London: John Murray, 1819), p. xxxvi.

Brontë takes this well-worn trope and responds to it by diverting the male gaze. In providing a contextual frame for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Self-Control* functions as a palimpsest lying underneath the surface. Whilst the idea that art reveals a love interest remains as a trace, Brontë works to rewrite the woman artist as an independent figure, separate from her work.

The heroines Helen Huntingdon and Laura Montreville do not merely share a physical resemblance, with their black ringlets described cascading over the canvas as they work; both turn to their talent for art to earn an independent living in times of financial hardship; both have to deal with the romantic attentions of a rake; and both novels even share a scene whereby the heroine casts a portrait of her lover into the fire in an attempt to conquer her feelings. Although Brunton remained resolute in the idea that her heroine should resist the urge to reform a rake, going to extreme lengths to show a conflicted Laura distancing herself from Hargrave, the reviewer for the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* had found Brunton's portrait of Hargrave too sympathetic, noting the concern that 'her narrative will either prove uninteresting in the perusal, or immoral in its tendency.'<sup>24</sup> Despite its moral, didactic aims, *Self-Control* could easily prove a bad influence by encouraging young, female readers to form such attachments. Brontë, in contrast, aimed to show the brutal consequences of marrying a man based on the passion aroused by physical attraction by taking her novel beyond the marriage plot, yet faced criticism for going too far.

### **Looking to the Past in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall***

Although *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was published in 1848, Anne Brontë looks back to the concerns of the 1820s by setting the majority of the novel during this period. The novel opens with the narrative of Gilbert Markham, as he recounts in a letter to his friend Jack Halford

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<sup>24</sup> Anon, 'Review: *Self-Control*', *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, Vol. 3: October 1811 (Hunter's Square, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Waugh, and Innes, 1811), pp. 259-73 (p. 267).

how he came to meet the mysterious new resident of Wildfell Hall: ‘You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827’,<sup>25</sup> he writes, recalling how the arrival of a young woman, accompanied only by her son and a servant, soon attracted his attention. In the close-knit community of Linden-Car it is widely assumed that she must be a widow, but taking her mother’s maiden name, the woman calling herself Helen Graham has in actual fact fled to the dilapidated old manor house to escape the clutches of her dissolute husband, Arthur Huntingdon. Helen is able to support herself and her child through the sale of her artwork, and prioritizes setting up a studio space of her own within the confines of the hall.

Aside from *Self-Control*, Brontë’s novel also bears traces of earlier novels concerned with the constraints of an unhappy marriage written during the 1790s. For example, Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* (1792), and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), are two novels which equate domestic tyranny with the state of the nation and depict a dissolute husband attempt to sell his wife.<sup>26</sup> In Smith’s novel, Geraldine Verney’s sense of duty to her husband sees her willing to travel across war-torn France at his summons. Chris Jones argues that this portrait of female compliance is intended to be read as a parody, whilst Diana Bowstead suggests that Smith indirectly raises the question of whether a woman ought to be submissive or rebellious in Geraldine’s situation.<sup>27</sup> Brontë’s response in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is to allow her heroine to make the proactive choice to leave her husband, and explore how a woman might live independently as an artist. Subverting the trope of the crumbling manor house as a patriarchal stronghold or place of female imprisonment, as seen

<sup>25</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001); Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman; Or, Maria*, ed. by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 163; Diana Bowstead, ‘Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond*: the Epistolary Novel as Ideological Argument’, in *Fetter’d or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, ed. by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 237-63 (p.253).

in Wollstonecraft's *Maria* when the heroine is wrongfully held in an asylum, Wildfell Hall provides a place of solace for Helen.

The first edition of this, Anne Brontë's second novel, sold out in six weeks, but her work shocked readers and reviewers for what was perceived as its 'coarseness'. The all too realistic characterization of an alcoholic, adulterous brute provoked criticism which caused Charlotte Brontë to suppress the text after her sister's death. The most vehement attack came from *Sharpe's London Magazine*:

indeed, so revolting are many of the scenes, so coarse and disgusting the language put into the mouths of some characters, that the reviewer to whom we entrusted it returned it to us, saying it was unfit to be noticed in the pages of SHARPE; and we are so far of the same opinion, that our object in the present paper is to warn our readers, and more especially our lady-readers, against being induced to peruse it, either by the powerful interest of the story, or the talent with which it is written.<sup>28</sup>

Although they found the character of Helen 'interesting in the extreme'<sup>29</sup> for having a sense of duty to 'compel our admiration',<sup>30</sup> they refused to believe rumours that a woman could have written such a work and felt that it was unsuitable reading material for women, with the harsh reality presented counteracting the effects of any moral message conveyed.

Controversy also lay in the idea that Helen, in choosing to leave her husband, effectively removes his property. Under the law of coverture, not only would Helen and her child be considered the property of her husband, but her art materials and the proceeds she makes from selling her work would, by rights, belong to him. Written in the wake of Caroline Norton's 1836 infamous *crim-con* case, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* constitutes a manifesto contributing to the demands being made for social reform, in terms of married women's property and child custody, which would culminate in the passing of the Women's Property

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<sup>28</sup> Anon, Review, *Sharpe's London Magazine: A Journal of Entertainment and Instruction for General Reading*, Vol. 7: August 1848 (London: Hall & Co., 1848), pp. 181-84 (pp. 181-82).

<sup>29</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*, p. 182.

<sup>30</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*, p. 183.

Act (1870).<sup>31</sup> *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* represents a revolutionary, paradigm-shifting text in its depiction of a woman with the talent and bravery to set herself up independently as an artist. Women artists were becoming increasingly visible, with increasing opportunities in the art world to turn an amateur accomplishment into professional endeavour. *Hood's Magazine* praised Helen for 'the somewhat refined amusement of painting, in which delightful art she is somewhat skilled',<sup>32</sup> but, linking art and artifice, interpret Brontë's heroine as a seductress who uses her artistic accomplishments to attract the attention of the opposite sex. Despite the lack of evidence to characterize her as a duplicitous and vain *painted* woman, acknowledging that 'however much she may paint, we have no evidence that she rouges',<sup>33</sup> they nevertheless cast Helen as a woman out to make 'a decided conquest' of Gilbert.<sup>34</sup> The figure of an independent woman is not merely difficult to categorize, but threatens to destabilize the family unit. Despite the potential to critique Helen, most censure was reserved for the portrayal of Arthur.

Anne Brontë's response was to pen a preface to the second edition in which she could question the accusation that she had gone 'too far' in her depiction of the consequences of alcohol abuse: 'I may have gone too far, in which case I shall be careful not to trouble myself or my readers in the same way again'.<sup>35</sup> Drew Lamonica Arms argues that whilst Brontë's conditional phrasing here 'seemingly admits culpability', it also raises the question of

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<sup>31</sup> When Caroline Norton (1808-1877) left her husband in 1836 she tried to live on her earnings as a writer, but the money was confiscated as the property of her husband, who also prevented her from seeing her children and accused her of having an affair with Lord Melbourne. Although the Criminal Conversation (adultery) case was thrown out of court, Norton still struggled to obtain a divorce or gain access to her children. Her subsequent campaigning led to the passing of the Custody of Infants Act (1839) and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), as well as the Married Women's Property Act (1870), which finally granted a wife a separate legal identity from that of her husband. See Ian Ward, 'The Case of Helen Huntingdon', *Criticism*, 49.2 (Spring 2007), 151-82, for a detailed consideration of the legal status of Brontë's heroine.

<sup>32</sup> Anon, 'Review: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Hood's Magazine*, Vol. 10: July-December 1848 (London: E. Churton, 1848), pp. 555-60 (p. 555).

<sup>33</sup> Anon, *Hood's Magazine*, p. 555.

<sup>34</sup> Anon, *Hood's Magazine*, p. 556.

<sup>35</sup> Anne Brontë, 'Preface' to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 4.

whether or not she did go too far.<sup>36</sup> Although Brontë modestly refutes her ability to reform society, she defends publishing her ‘humble quota towards so good an aim’ as ‘truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it’.<sup>37</sup> Recalling Brunton’s preface to *Self-Control*, Brontë emphasizes her duty to be useful, but where Brunton displays anxiety surrounding the compatibility of writing with a woman’s domestic life, Brontë is adamant that gender should not dictate how a woman might be considered useful, or what they should be expected to read or write:

I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.<sup>38</sup>

This declaration makes an important claim for women’s art. The suggestion that gender should not be of consequence to the art one produces or consumes resonates in terms of Brontë’s career as a writer as well as her heroine’s career as an artist. As seen in the previous chapter, characterizing the likes of Hemans and Landon as ‘female poets’ sought to limit the scope of their work to within the bounds of acceptable femininity. Writing anonymously, under the gender-neutral pseudonym of Acton Bell, Brontë is thus able to challenge the separate spheres binary.

Such paratextual framing, which acknowledges the critique received but justifies the content, provides a lead-in which shapes the reader’s experience in the hope of generating a more sympathetic response, or at least preparing the reader to challenge their beliefs as they cross the boundary into the text. The concept of framing is particularly significant given that this is a novel structured by enclosing Helen’s Huntingdon’s diary within Gilbert Markham’s first person narration. Helen’s experiences remain a secret until she is compelled to hand over

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<sup>36</sup> Drew Lamonica Arms, ‘I may have gone too far’: Reappraising Coarseness in Anne Brontë’s Preface to the Second Edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *Brontë Studies*, 44.1 (2019), 33-42 (p. 36).

<sup>37</sup> Brontë, ‘Preface’ to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Brontë, ‘Preface’ to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 5.

her diary to Gilbert in order to exonerate herself from rumours surrounding her love life and explain why she is not in a position to encourage Gilbert's advances. Including her embedded diary not only allows Helen to take control of the narrative, but gives immediacy to her experiences. Whilst revisiting past ideas can serve to change the present, the structure is problematic in that it is Gilbert who ultimately frames Helen's text. N.M. Jacobs compares the technique of narrative framing to the law of coverture, likening the legal implications of a man owning his wife and subsuming her identity to the form of the novel.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, there is the issue of consent, given that the reader has to assume that Gilbert has secured Helen's permission to share her diary.

The perceived level of success or failure of the narrative structure of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has long been subject to debate. George Moore, who had praised *Agnes Grey* (1847), was particularly critical of what he saw as a breakdown in the narrative which showed Brontë's lack of experience. Anne Brontë's first biographer, Winifred Gérin, agreed with Moore, criticizing the 'clumsy device of a plot within a plot'.<sup>40</sup> Moore thought that Helen should have sat down with Gilbert to tell him her story directly:

Anne broke down in the middle of her story, but her breakdown was not for lack of genius but of experience. An accident would have saved her; almost any man of letters would have laid his hand upon her arm and said: You must not let your heroine give her diary to the young farmer.<sup>41</sup>

The physical absence of the heroine is a problem for Moore. Antonia Losano interprets this as a reflection of the idea that 'women's bodies must not be separated from their productions, but must be present, tangible, and visible.'<sup>42</sup> With Helen's diary metonymically standing for

<sup>39</sup> N.M. Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative in "Wuthering Heights" and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16.3 (Fall 1986), 204-19 (p. 207).

<sup>40</sup> Winifred Gérin, 'Introduction' to Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by G.D. Hargreaves (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> George Moore, *Conversations in Ebury Street* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), pp. 253-54.

<sup>42</sup> Losano, 'The Professionalization of the Woman Artist', p. 23.

her visual works of art, Losano demonstrates how Brontë is able to write an artist heroine whose productions ‘are necessarily separate from her own body’.<sup>43</sup> Here, Losano presents an ideological dimension to Brontë’s choice of narrative structure in that it reflects the separation of the artist from her artwork. By handing over the diary, ‘Helen seems to be positioning an aesthetic production between her body and her male viewer or reader’,<sup>44</sup> with Losano likening this to the numerous occasions when Helen uses a canvas or easel to create a physical screen or barrier. Brontë, thus, manages to resist the embodiment of the artist by her art; an issue which has problematized the interpretation of women’s art in texts throughout this thesis.

Whilst critics including Elizabeth Signorotti believe that Gilbert’s narrative subsumes Helen’s diary content,<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Langland’s feminist reading of the liberation provided by Helen’s diary stands in direct contrast to Signorotti’s identification of male control.<sup>46</sup> Juliet McMaster has defended the ‘immediacy’ of the diary,<sup>47</sup> and Terry Eagleton argues that it is Helen’s diary which ‘becomes the guts of the work, displacing the framework that surrounds it.’<sup>48</sup> I would argue that the interplay between perspectives is what is important as it allows for the simultaneous existence of both possibilities. In this case, Gilbert’s narrative is not so much a frame, but rather a competing narrative. N.M. Jacobs articulates the difference in terms of viewing pictures in a gallery. In contrast to the static experience described through the metaphorical comparison of an inset narrative to a framed picture, Jacobs suggests that framing narratives ‘are more like competing works of art, or outer rooms in a gallery, or even

<sup>43</sup> Losano, ‘The Professionalization of the Woman Artist’, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Losano, ‘The Professionalization of the Woman Artist’, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Signorotti, ‘“A Frame Perfect and Glorious”: Narrative Structure in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,’ *Victorian Newsletter*, 87 (1995), 20-25.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Langland, ‘The Voicing of Feminine Desire in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,’ in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. by Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp. 111-23 (p. 112).

<sup>47</sup> Juliet McMaster, ‘“Imbecile Laughter” and “Desperate Earnest” in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,’ *Modern Language Quarterly*, 43.4 (December 1982), 352–68 (p. 363).

<sup>48</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p. 136.

the picture painted over a devalued older canvas'. According to Jacobs, 'We cannot see or experience the blurred reality of the "framed" story without first experiencing the "framing" narrative. There is no other way in.'<sup>49</sup> Jacobs's simile, likening the competing narratives to a painted over canvas is particularly resonant, and can be developed further given that Helen cannot erase her drawings of Arthur, faint outlines of which remain as revelatory pentimenti on the reverse side of her paintings. The term pentimenti, deriving from the Italian for 'repentance', refers to traces which show an artist changing their mind as they develop a composition. However, the idea of repentance is doubly significant for Helen in that she will live to regret her feelings for Arthur, especially given that the trace outlines of her drawings mean that her secret desires will not remain hidden. Improprieties cannot simply be painted over and forgotten.

N.M. Jacobs identifies the framed narrative structure as 'an authorial strategy for dealing with the unacceptability of the subject matter'.<sup>50</sup> Drawing on MacAndrew's characterization of the Gothic framing device as creating a 'closed-off region within an outer world',<sup>51</sup> Jacobs describes how the familiarity and propriety provided by the framing narrative prepare the reader to encounter the more unpalatable aspects of the narrative to come. However, in the case of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Gilbert Markham does not serve to 'define the limits of propriety and to measure observed events against the official standards of morality'.<sup>52</sup> Gilbert is far from a moral authority, displaying the toxic traits of a jealous and hot-tempered young man who is quick to judge and cruelly whips Lawrence under the misbelief that he is Helen's secret lover, not her brother. That said, he does represent an improvement on Arthur Huntingdon as Gilbert's impressions can be reformed by looking

<sup>49</sup> Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative', pp. 206-07.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative', p. 206.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 110, quoted in Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative', p. 206.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Robinson Taylor, *Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1981), p. 22, quoted in Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative', p. 206.

back to the content of Helen's diary. As Jacobs emphasizes, the frame may enable us to return to 'some version of the domestic bliss that was the Victorian Ideal', but, 'we have seen an under-world or other-world that is still latent in the structures of the comfortable reality'.<sup>53</sup> Whilst the past cannot be fully escaped or erased, this would not be desirable; by acknowledging uncomfortable truths, attention is drawn to wrongs in a way which facilitates reform. Elizabeth Shand proposes that 'by reading Gilbert's and Helen's narratives as enfolded, rather than layered or competing, their marriage becomes a more positive result of the interrelation of their distinct narratives.'<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Shand goes on to argue that Brontë experiments with perspective in order to show that the novel form can do more than art, and should, therefore, be judged on separate terms. However, the figure of a woman artist is used to facilitate this discussion, and it should not be forgotten that art provides Helen's independence.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe how Brontë heroines hide behind their art, noting how the 'duplicious' Helen Graham 'uses her art both to express and to camouflage herself'.<sup>55</sup> This is not only the case when Helen disguises the locations she paints with fictitious titles and signs her work with false initials, should her singular hand betray her whereabouts, as Gilbert and Gubar argue that this 'duplicity' is intrinsic to the woman artist. They also identify 'duplicity' at play in her earlier practice of concealing sketches of Arthur Huntingdon on the reverse of her paintings so that her secret desire remains hidden:

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<sup>53</sup> Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative', p. 217.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Shand, 'Enfolded Narrative in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Refusing 'a perfect work of art', *Brontë Studies*, 44.3 (July 2019), 292-305 (p. 303).

<sup>55</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*, 2nd Ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 81.

Whether Helen covertly uses a supposedly modest young lady's "accomplishments" for unladylike self-expression or publicly flaunts her professionalism and independence, she must in some sense deny or conceal her own art, or at least deny the self-assertion implicit in her art.<sup>56</sup>

The term 'duplicity' sounds too much like Helen is complicit in her own situation; the seductive 'painted' woman of the *Hood's Magazine* review, rather than someone restricted by the double bind of society's demand for modestly concealed self-expression. Whilst Gilbert and Gubar's pioneering study reveals a uniquely female experience, in focusing upon the limitations women face we risk overlooking the potential for radical change. Brontë heroines paint original compositions: their work is unique, unconventional, unexpected, and resists biographical interpretation. Men do try to use art for courtship purposes, yet this is resisted. However, Gilbert and Gubar do not consider Helen's strategies to defy the male gaze. The painting Helen conceives as her 'masterpiece' is a telling case in point.

The appellation 'masterpiece' reveals that Helen did have early aspirations as an artist before circumstance finally led her to paint professionally. What is more, the ekphrastic description penned by her shows that she has developed her own style: 'I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage, than is commonly attempted in painting.'<sup>57</sup> The subsequent switch to the passive voice to describe how 'The scene represented was an open glade in a wood',<sup>58</sup> serves to separate the artist from her artwork. Whilst this image has the power to stand alone, it is nevertheless interpreted as a biographical piece by Arthur Huntingdon:

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<sup>56</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 81.

<sup>57</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 159.

<sup>58</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 159.

‘Very pretty, I’ faith!’ said he, after attentively regarding it for a few seconds – ‘and a very fitting study for a young lady – Spring just opening into summer – morning just approaching noon – girlhood just ripening into womanhood – and hope just verging on fruition. She’s a sweet creature! but why didn’t you make her black hair?’<sup>59</sup>

The painting is not intended to be a self-portrait, and the figure depicted is blonde rather than brunette to resist the association between the artwork and the artist. However, Huntingdon misreads the image as representing the sexual awakening Helen is experiencing from his attention. Observing that the composition is a fitting subject for a girl positions Huntingdon as a false connoisseur. Brontë, of course, challenges the very notion of gender specificity in her preface, and the novel content itself enhances her argument by showing how women’s art has been misrepresented and misinterpreted.

This problematic view of the woman artist is not limited to Arthur Huntingdon, as Gilbert Markham frequently eroticizes the act of painting. However, a close reading of Gilbert’s appraisal does show Helen’s resistance to the male gaze:

She did not talk much; but I stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dextrously guided by those fair and graceful fingers. But ere long they became impaired, they began to hesitate, to tremble slightly, and make false strokes, and then suddenly came a pause, while their owner laughingly raised her face to mine and told me that her sketch did not profit by my superintendence.<sup>60</sup>

Gilbert derives erotic pleasure from watching the tremble of her hand, but Helen feels distracted by his intense scrutiny and admits that she struggles to work under his penetrating gaze. On another occasion, Gilbert follows her to a secluded location even though she has purposefully isolated herself from the group out walking so that she can concentrate on her work. Not interested in talking to Gilbert, once again she asks him to leave her alone. He silently watches her work, ‘admiring this magnificent prospect’ before him: ‘‘Now,’ thought

<sup>59</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 160.

<sup>60</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 54.

I, ‘If I had but a pencil and a morsel of paper, I could make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me.’<sup>61</sup> Positioning himself behind Helen, he can frame a view which attests to the aesthetic appeal of the artist at work in the natural landscape.

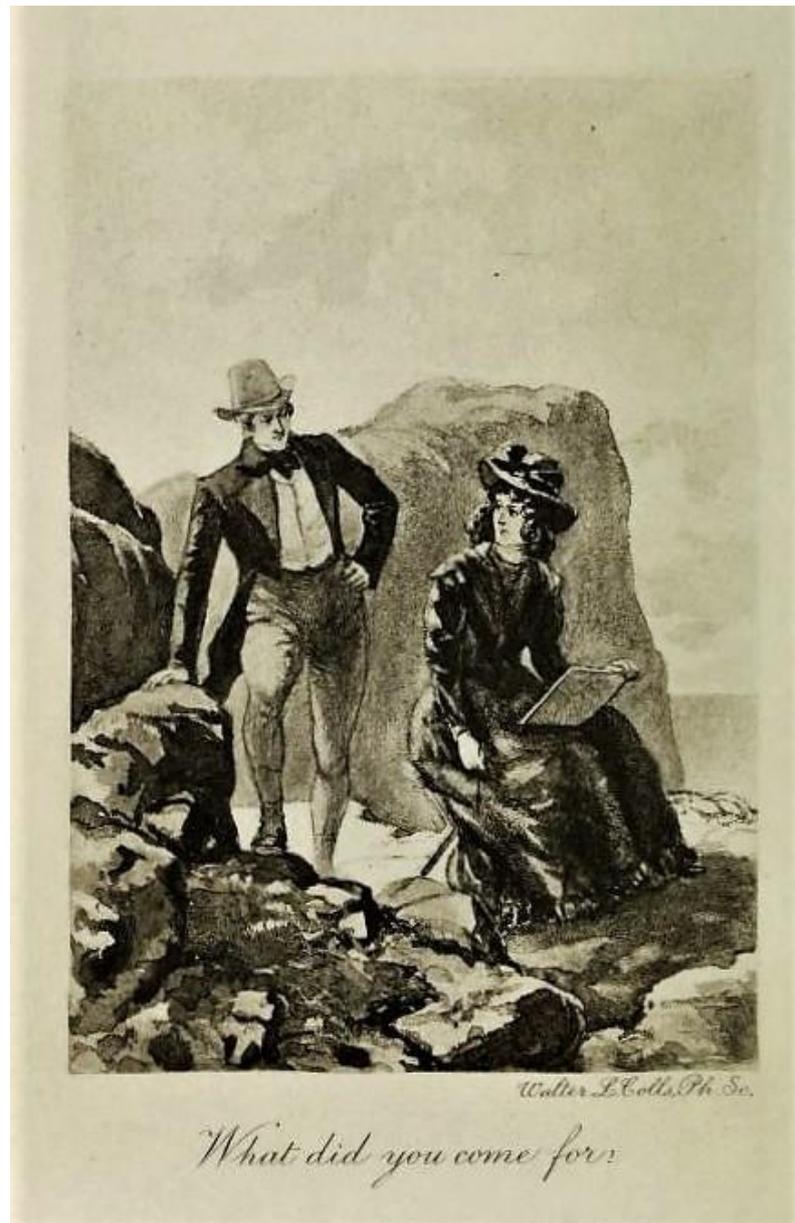


Figure 6.2: Walter L. Colls Illustration for Chapter Seven of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1901) (Wikimedia Commons).

<sup>61</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 67.

As a connoisseur of beauty, Gilbert privileges his view above that of the artist. He can voyeuristically satisfy his scopophilic urge by watching Helen paint, eroticizing the process and placing the value on her physical appearance rather than on the skill displayed in her finished painting. The paradox of a Rückenfigur composition, where the figure is painted from behind,<sup>62</sup> is evident in that whilst Gilbert has placed himself in a position of power by encroaching on his subject to enjoy the scene, the faceless subject resists representation, remaining beyond the viewer's grasp.

Reconsidering Gilbert's framing narrative in light of this scene, the importance of having Helen's immediate and unmediated thoughts from her embedded diary becomes clear. This diary was not written for public view, and neither is the story filtered through Gilbert's warped perspective. Comparing the structure of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to Felicia Hemans's poem 'Properzia Rossi', the male *status quo* of the frame is similarly disrupted by the woman artist's first person narrative. Although the gendered idea of art as an accomplishment to attract the male gaze survives in the text of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë 'paints over' this world view by showing how art can provide a woman with independence.

Helen may be a raven-haired visual counterpart to de Staël's Corinne, but she does not work for fame. She works hard to nurture a talent which she recognizes can be put to use to earn her an independent living, and is compelled to succeed with the motivation: 'I must not take my son and starve.'<sup>63</sup> Helen may be a pragmatist rather than a Romantic, but she is still a born artist. Possessing the eye of an artist, her talent is something she cannot simply switch off or ignore. Troubled by incessant thoughts, regarding how to achieve certain effects

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<sup>62</sup> Casper David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818), is a notable example.

<sup>63</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 352.

upon canvas, she declares: ‘I almost wish I were not a painter.’<sup>64</sup> Given this characterization of innate talent put to practical use, a question which remains is whether or not Helen continues to paint after her marriage to Gilbert. Helen becomes financially secure and able to live an independent life following the death of her husband, and the inheritance of her uncle’s wealth meaning that she no longer needs to paint to earn a living should she choose not to. However, looking back to the conclusion of *Self-Control*, Laura Montreville still expresses the desire to be useful once married to De Courcy, suggesting that the artist heroine never really lays down her brush. Taking the novel beyond the marriage plot, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a text of second chances and improved situations. Helen has faced her own ‘Choice of Hercules’ in choosing to leave her husband and pursue her art, but this is no clear path of virtue or vice.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Choice of Hercules**

One of the paintings Laura produces in *Self-Control* is a piece on the theme of the ‘Choice of Hercules’, with her own likeness forming an allegorical representation of virtue, pulling the figure of Hercules away from the alluring path of vice. With only the back of the canvas visible in *Nameless and Friendless*, we do not know what image has been painted by the woman artist depicted in Osborn’s work. However, the image as a whole can be interpreted along the lines of the ‘Choice of Hercules’ theme, with the artist faced with the choice between virtue and vice: whilst a virtuous path can be followed by selling her artwork, the path of vice looms large as the male customers gaze at the woman rather than her work. The image of the ballerina in their grasp hints at the possibility of taking to the stage, or even

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<sup>64</sup> Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> Although socially, legally, and theologically problematic, leaving was the mode of conduct Patrick Brontë advised Mrs Collins when she confided in him about her abusive husband. This conversation may have inspired the plot of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

selling her body. The image recalls Angelica Kauffman's *Self-Portrait of the Artist hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794), with Osborn's artist presented at a similar crossroads. However, with little possibility of leading a life of virtue should the print seller reject her work and turn her away, Osborn highlights the precarious position of women left friendless, attempting to earn an independent living. Ultimately, women remain dependent upon men who hold wealth and power. In this context, the painting's subtitle, "*The rich man's wealth is his strong city, etc.*", taken from Proverbs (x. 15), emphasizes the stronghold of rich men within the urban economy. Deborah Cherry describes the painting as: 'one of the few works by women to address urban space at the mid-century. Concerned less with jostling crowds, this is a painting about the sexualised encounters and economies of the modern city, its spaces of pleasure, exchange and consumption'.<sup>66</sup> Cherry reads the image in the context of the passing of the Obscene publications Act (September 1857), noting the potential for the legitimate and the obscene to blur and exist side-by-side in the London print shop.

Now held in the collection of the Tate, the painting's description highlights 'three distinct ways in which women of all classes inhabit the urban realm'.<sup>67</sup> The three models of femininity presented are all subsumed by male control: the affluent wife and mother leaving the shop with her son; the ballerina sexualized as a commodity to be bought; and the artist attempting to make a living. Cherry describes the artist as a 'middle-class working woman who could not easily be categorised'. This is because her 'respectability, the basis of her class identity and her sexuality, is at risk'.<sup>68</sup> The artist does not neatly fit into prescribed categories of femininity and the fate of the woman depicted could see her go either way. However, I would argue that art does have the capacity to provide an alternative from the faceless wife or

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<sup>66</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850 -1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> Tate Catalogue Entry for *Nameless and Friendless* [online]: <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/osborn-nameless-and-friendless-the-rich-mans-wealth-is-his-strong-city-etc-proverbs-x-15-t12936>> [accessed 14/10/19]

<sup>68</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 79.

objectified dancer. Brontë's novel shows how a woman artist could carve her own path to independence and still find domestic happiness in marriage should she choose it. However, this is a mid-nineteenth-century view, formulated amidst increased opportunities for women artists.

Just as Brontë works to resist Helen being seen as the embodiment of her art, Osborn does not present a biographical study of her own struggle in *Nameless and Friendless*. Osborn was supported by her family and had the opportunity to train as an artist at Dickinson's academy in Maddox Street and then at Leigh's in Newman Street, and could count Queen Victoria as a patroness. However, Osborn understood the plight faced by women artists and became a staunch campaigner for women's rights. She became a member of the Society of Female Artists when it was founded in 1857, and was one of the signatories to an 1859 petition for the Royal Academy to admit female students to their schools. *Nameless and Friendless* has become a familiar image, with the juxtaposition of the artist's skill and the subject matter providing a reminder of the success women artists can achieve despite the potential to face judgement at every turn.

George Moore, the critic who bemoaned Brontë's lack of experience, did not restrict his comments to women writers. In *Modern Painting* (1893), he attacks women artists, novelists, and poets by suggesting that 'their achievements are slight indeed'.<sup>69</sup> According to Moore, women cannot 'penetrate below the surface', and are at their best when 'confined to the arrangements of themes invented by men'.<sup>70</sup> Moore's lack of respect is such that he proposes that should all women's art be lost, it would leave no lamentable void:

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<sup>69</sup> George Moore, *Modern Painting* (New York: Bretano's, 1910?), p. 226.

<sup>70</sup> Moore, *Modern Painting*, p. 226.

The world would certainly be the poorer by some half-dozen charming novels, by a few charming poems and sketches in oil and watercolour, but it cannot be maintained, at least not seriously, that if these charming triflings were withdrawn there would remain any gap in the world's art to be filled up. Women have created nothing, they have carried the art of men across their fans charmingly, with exquisite taste, delicacy, and subtlety of feeling, and they have most hideously and most mournfully parodied the art of men.<sup>71</sup>

Moore believes that women conceal the truth when they do not invent. Art needs sex, and the dedication of the male genius not tied to hearth and home. Although 'England produces countless thousands of lady artists', none, it seems, are worth noting. Angelica Kauffman is reduced to a mere imitator of Reynolds, with Moore describing her as 'individually feeble'.<sup>72</sup> However, there is one woman artist whom Moore does admire: the French Impressionist, Berthe Morisot: 'She has created a style, and has done so by investing her art with all her femininity; her art is no dull parody of ours: it is all womanhood – sweet and gracious, tender and wistful womanhood.'<sup>73</sup> Morisot succeeds where so many others have failed because she does not attempt to hide or deny her sex. For all Moore's essentialism, his view of Morisot does show how progress can be made. In describing Morisot as 'the eighteenth century quick with the nineteenth; she is the nineteenth turning her eyes regretfully back on the eighteenth',<sup>74</sup> Moore allows for looking back to provide a means of looking forward; the strong lines of a great age underlying and informing her new, impressionistic style. Just as photographers looked to copy the poses of Old Masters as a means to legitimize a new art form, traces of the past remain as progress is made. Similarly, Anne Brontë's references back to Mary Brunton display a willingness to use and learn from what went before.

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<sup>71</sup> Moore, *Modern Painting*, pp. 226-27.

<sup>72</sup> Moore, *Modern Painting*, p. 229.

<sup>73</sup> Moore, *Modern Painting*, p. 235.

<sup>74</sup> Moore, *Modern Painting*, p. 237.

## Final Conclusions

The many and varied texts studied in this thesis illustrate the potential for the woman artist to be revered or ridiculed; to be accepted or exiled; to thrive or die. As a figure of contrasts, caught in the struggle between vice and virtue, the tension between eroticism and aesthetics described by Losano in relation to Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is actually a fitting description to extend to the woman artist in fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As opposed to finding a simple narrative of progress through the course of the century, this thesis reveals a nuanced variety of portraits of the woman artist, with art used as a means to explore personal successes and defeats. Art might be a divine calling, or it may just as easily provide a temporary solution to ease a troubled mind, or yield financial support. As argued in Susan Fraiman's work on the *Künstlerinroman*, quoted in my Introduction, the woman artist's experience is less linear than the path of her male counterpart. Owing to the constant tension faced between the expectations of gender and the demands of art, the woman artist's development is akin to the negotiation of a crossroads.<sup>75</sup> Such issues cannot simply be resolved, as seen by each generation's tendency to refer back to the struggles faced by the one before. What is important is for women's art to be viewed as a unique product of this situation, and not as a failure based upon male, institutional standards. Four out of the five differences experienced by women artists, outlined by Linda Huf in her study of twentieth-century American literature, can be identified in their eighteenth-century British counterparts: their 'masculine' temperament; a ruling conflict between work and womanhood; the existence of a sexually conventional love rival; and a radical drive to fight for women's rights can be seen in the examples studied.<sup>76</sup> However, where Huf lists the woman artist's 'want of a Muse', describing the presence of men as detrimental to the artistic process, I propose a supportive and reciprocal Artist/Muse relationship between women, whereby women not

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<sup>75</sup> Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, p. x.

<sup>76</sup> Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, pp. 4-11.

only inspire each other, but teach one another. This mutual benefit is particularly evident between sister artists, who pursue different artistic talents.

The representation of the woman artist in women's writing offers a rich insight into the perceived value of women's art, revealing how women are seen in society. Aside from being a productive means of mirroring the creative process of the writer, the artist heroine raises wider political issues of gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and nationhood. In short, the artist allows writers to engage with the wider concerns raised by 'the woman question'. More than simply an autobiographical avatar of the woman writer, the artist engages with aesthetics, economics, and education by entering the debates surrounding the status of the copy and what is suitable or achievable work for women artists. It is not possible to see the woman artist purely through the lens of her chosen profession. Society and culture are intrinsic to the intersectional portrayal of the woman artist and this is what makes the artist so fascinating and useful a subject for writers to turn to. Whether writers present a utopian fantasy where women's art can flourish or they lay bare the struggles and prejudices faced by women attempting to sell their work, the novels and poems discussed in this thesis actively comment upon political concerns.

On one hand *The Living Muses* were hailed for the potential of improvement in the arts to result in the improvement of the nation, but on the other hand, the Corinne-like woman artist, pursuing fame ahead of a family life, was not seen as an acceptable presence in the drawing rooms of Great Britain. The woman artist is not a static or universal character type. Even though the same tropes are repeated, with the appearance of the artist mirroring the dark-haired image of the allegory of art, and the sketching of a portrait interpreted as a courtship ritual, the artist heroine nevertheless resists becoming a stereotype or stock figure. The woman artist is an 'Other'; a woman so difficult to categorize it is questioned whether she can fulfil the role of a wife and mother, or even survive within the confines of British

society. She does not fit the feminine ideal of the demure blonde: she is strangely alluring; sexually deviant; a public woman who defiantly challenges the *status quo* to gain fame or financial independence, yet she does so by practising female accomplishments, and reveals her loves and losses through her work. However, the liminal spaces occupied by women artists, whether in the far reaches of the Outer Hebrides or beyond the borders of Great Britain in the warmer climes of Italy, show that there is still a place for an ‘Other’ like the woman artist to thrive.

In 2018 Sotheby’s sold just fourteen works by women artists during their Old Masters sale, compared to 1,100 works by men. The much publicized sale of January 2019, hailed as ‘The Female Triumphant’, sought to address the imbalance with a selection of twenty-one masterworks by fourteen women artists up for auction, including pieces by Angelica Kauffman and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. Vigée Le Brun’s *Portrait of Muhammad Dervish Khan* (1788) in fact sold for \$7.2 million, setting a new record for a pre-modern woman artist.<sup>77</sup> Although this figure is still very low when compared to the staggering sums commanded by male artists, the sale shows the increasing awareness of women’s art in the public consciousness. Scholarship on women’s contribution to the arts is needed to support and encourage the growing interest in this area and enhance our understanding of the many and varied ways women were involved in spite of the limitations imposed. In addressing the literary representation of woman artists during the long eighteenth century, this thesis fills one of the major gaps in scholarship on women’s art. Whilst there is still a long way to go in changing the way we view women’s art, the character of the woman artist is far from the blank space in fiction identified by Sharon Spencer.<sup>78</sup> To respond to Ellen C. Clayton’s observation that women artists ‘have left but faintly impressed footprints on the sands of

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<sup>77</sup> Sotheby’s, Auction Catalogue for ‘The Female Triumphant’ Sale [online]: <<https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2019/master-paintings-evening-n10007/lot.48.html>> [accessed 15/07/20]

<sup>78</sup> Spencer, “‘Femininity’ and the woman writer”, p. 247.

time',<sup>79</sup> the tide has now turned to reveal much more than a trace. The contribution of women artists and writers is in view, uncovered ready for analysis, if we are willing to give it the time and attention it deserves.

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<sup>79</sup> Clayton, *English Female Artists*, p. 2.

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