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A DISCOURSE OF THEIR OWN?
THE CRITIQUE OF LUXURY IN SELECTED PROSE
OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS

by

Liang Wenqi

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada, 1993

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ABSTRACT

Luxuria, one of the seven deadly sins, is usually personified as female in the tradition of Western literature. Although the literary expression of luxury and conspicuous consumption has been discussed by critics, no critical attention has been given to women's own treatment of it in the works of female prose writers. The aim of this thesis is twofold: first, to view the works of Sarah Scott, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More in the context of the luxury debate and second, to recognize specific features of female education in these same works having to do with Luxuria. In this thesis the works of these female writers are examined in the light of Marxian theories by Bloch, Lukács, Althusser, Macherey and Jameson. Although no common arguments for luxury have been sustained in these female writers' works, they do provide us with a distinctively female perspective on human luxury; they also serve as pivotal points in the changing ways in which women viewed themselves, from figures of conspicuous consumption to moral educators.

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Introduction

"On a déclamé contre le luxe depuis deux mille ans,
en vers et en prose, et on l'a toujours aimé."¹

[For two thousand years men had declaimed in verse and in
prose against luxury, while all the time they loved it.]

--Voltaire

This dissertation analyzes how a selected number of
eighteenth-century women writers treat the subject of
luxury. Over the centuries luxury has been a perennial
topic of debate among politicians, philosophers, historians,
economists and, most visibly, among literary men and women.
My discussion here focuses on the views towards luxury of
Sarah Robinson Scott, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary
Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, as manifested in their
literary works. By placing their views on luxury in the
context of the contemporary political, historical,
sociological and ideological milieu, this dissertation
attempts to clarify the stances of these women writers in
this important ideological debate and throw light on the
self-images that these women writers projected for
themselves, for these images were different from the ones
created by their male contemporaries. My discussion in this

¹ Voltaire, Dictionnaire Philosophique (Paris: Editions
Garnier Frères, 1967) 291.

introductory chapter chiefly focuses on three questions: 1) Why luxury? 2) why women? 3) why these women? My discussion will also involve female education, a moot issue among the eighteenth-century intelligentsia, but closely related to the female point of view on the subject of luxury.

1. Why luxury?

In Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett John Sekora points out: ". . . the concept is one of the oldest, most important, and most pervasive negative principles for organizing society Western history has known."² In spite of its evolution in meaning,³ luxury remains a theme that unlocks the meaning of other social relationships and is a major theme in eighteenth-century English literature.

The luxury debate dates at least as far back as St. Augustine, who denounced lust for money and possessions as one of the three principal sins of fallen man, lust for power (libido dominandi) and sexual lust being the other two.⁴ Although St. Augustine did not anticipate the later

² John Sekora, Luxury: the Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) 1-2.

³ Sekora 23-131.

⁴ See Albert O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 9.

Mandevillian theory about luxury verbatim, he did point out that one vice may check another.⁵ From the seventeenth century well into the eighteenth century the luxury debate was invigorated by the emergence of mercantilism, which in turn affected the development of the Protestant ethic. Max Weber asserts that it was Calvinism that fostered the growth of capitalism, which in its due course generated conspicuous consumption.⁶ Puritanism regarded commercial business as a blessing in itself, yet it was against indulgence in luxuries. This paradox led to the reinvestment of earnings and to the further growth of the enterprises involved. The literary manifestation of this paradox became popular in eighteenth-century literature. Gary Kelly points out that "since fashion diverts money from virtuous to selfish use, it is related to another theme familiar in the moral literature of the earlier half of the eighteenth century,

⁵ St. Augustine says that the "civil virtue" characterizing the early Romans is that "the Babylonian love for their earthly fatherland suppressed the desire of wealth; also, many other vices are suppressed for one vice, the love of praise." See Hirschman 10, also Herbert A. Deane, The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) 44-56.

⁶ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1976) passim.

the idea of the use of riches."⁷

The eighteenth-century debate was initiated by Bernard Mandeville. His theory The Fable of the Bees (1714-1729) suggests that society is like a bee-hive where people's various pursuits of different interests lead to the proper functioning of society. Asceticism or the reformation of manners would only lead to the economic ruin of the hive or society.

As Pride and Luxury decrease,
So by degrees they leave the Seas.
Not Merchants now, but Companies
Remove whole Manufactories.
All Arts and Crafts neglected lie;
Content, the Bane of Industry,
Makes 'em admire their homely Store,
And neither seek nor covet more.⁸

Mandeville ends his poem "The Grumbling Hive" with the following moral: "Bare Virtue can't make Nations live in Splendor."⁹ Mandeville's attitude undoubtedly stems from a rapidly developing capitalist mode of production that

⁷ Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel: 1780-1805 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 36.

⁸ Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924) 1: 34-5.

⁹ Mandeville 1: 37.

necessitated trade and conspicuous consumption. His theory had considerable influence on eighteenth-century English thought. Hume, for example, defends and redefines luxury. In his opinion, although luxury is an evil, it may be a lesser evil than "sloth," which might result from banishing luxury. His view is more or less eclectic: "Let us, therefore, rest contented with asserting that two opposite vices in a state may be more advantageous than either of them alone: but let us never pronounce vice in itself advantageous."¹⁰ According to Hirschman, Hume also advocated restraining the "love of pleasure" by the "love of gain."¹¹ Adam Ferguson in "Essay on the History of Civil Society" (1767) argues that luxury possesses positive values for the material progress of society.¹² In his most influential work The Wealth of Nations (1776) Adam Smith asserts that luxury is good since it is economically beneficial. Smith even blunted the edge of Mandeville's arguments by substituting "advantage" and "interest" for "passion" and "vice" to make the proposition more palatable

¹⁰ David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," Writings on Economics ed. E. Rotwein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970) 31-2.

¹¹ Hirschman 26.

¹² Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: University Press, 1966) 251.

and persuasive.¹³

These are undoubtedly the arguments on the Whig side. On the other hand, the hostility towards luxury, largely Tory, was overwhelming, although Thomas Meier argues that the praise of business came from members of both parties.¹⁴ As J. W. Johnson points out, Clarendon thought the moral and political decay of the Restoration period was the result of "plenty, pride, and excess." Gilbert Burnet was so struck with the pernicious omnipresence of luxury that he tried to substitute it for Original Sin in some of his theological and ethical tracts. Sir William Temple saw all of English history as the cycle of poverty-courage-conquest-prosperity-luxury-decline.¹⁵ Even Smith, in spite of his awareness of the beneficial effect of luxury on the national economy as mentioned above, echoed Sir William Temple's cyclical view, when he pointed out that commerce led to debilitating luxury and corruption:

Another bad effect of commerce is that it sinks
the courage of mankind, and tends to extinguish

¹³ Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1937) passim.

¹⁴ Thomas Keith Meier, Defoe and the Defense of Commerce (ELS: University of Victoria press, 1987) 15.

¹⁵ James William Johnson, The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 49.

martial spirit . . . The defence of the country is therefore committed to a certain set of men who have nothing else to do, and among the bulk of the people military courage diminishes. By having their minds constantly employed on the arts of luxury, they grow effeminate and dastardly. ¹⁶

Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, as I point out below, was a typical representative of the classical attacks on luxury.

Not surprisingly, the debate over luxury found its way into English literature of the period. Perhaps Daniel Defoe's attitude is most illustrative of the differing positions. On one hand, he championed the rise of commerce and recognized that luxury stimulated trade. On the other hand, he had to admit that luxury was vicious and corrupt in his Explanatory Preface to "The True-Born Englishman" (1703).¹⁷ Addison in The Spectator (No. 55) allegorically condemns luxury, although he also expresses in No. 3 his admiration for the fast-expanding commerce and the prosperity it brought to the nation. Some early eighteenth-century writers were less ambivalent in their attitudes

¹⁶ Adam Smith, Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms, ed. E. Cannan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896) 42-3.

¹⁷ According to Meier, Defoe was always in favour of commerce; business was to be promoted, although sometimes luxury should be restricted on the part of the consumer. See Meier 85-7.

towards luxury. In Gulliver's Travels Swift condemns the luxury of English upper-class women: "this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female Yahoos could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in. . . ."18 Pope, in a subtler way, also voices his contempt for the luxurious female. His Belinda in "The Rape of the Lock" (1714) is, according to Louis Landa, "a consumer, the embodiment of luxury, (she) was . . . recognizably the final point in a vast nexus of enterprises, a vast commercial expansion which stirred the imagination of Englishmen to dwell on thoughts of greatness and magnificence."19 Laura Brown also discusses the representation of female luxury in her book on Pope and essay on Swift.20 Oliver Goldsmith is contradictory in his views of luxury. In "Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning" he condemns luxury as causing degeneration

18 Jonathan Swift, "Gulliver's Travels," The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis, 14 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1941) 11: 235-6.

19 Louis Landa, "Pope's Belinda, The General Emporium of the World, and the Wondrous Worm," Essays in Eighteenth-Century English Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 197.

20 Laura Brown discusses the complex implications of the image of Belinda in Alexander Pope (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 19-25. She also analyzes the historical and cultural configuration that encourages female luxury in the cause of colonialism and mercantile capitalism in "Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1990): 425-43.

to the whole nation.²¹ But in The Citizen of the World he approves commerce and its consequence--luxury. He argues:

Does the luxury of the one produce half the evils of the inhumanity of the other? Certainly those philosophers, who declaim against luxury, have but little understood its benefits; they seem insensible, that to luxury we owe not only the greatest part of our knowledge but even of our virtues.²²

Yet, in his dedication to the "Deserted Village" Goldsmith "inveighs against the increase of luxuries."

All the writers I mentioned above are male. The "manly" Samuel Johnson, the moralist, however, was convinced that luxury should be vindicated rather than repudiated, as he said to Goldsmith: "Luxury, so far as it reaches the poor, will do good to the race of people; it will strengthen and multiply them. Sir, no nation was ever hurt by luxury."²³

²¹ Oliver Goldsmith, "An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning," Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) 1: 299.

²² Goldsmith, "The Citizen of the World," Collected Works 2: 51.

²³ James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, eds. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) 2: 218.

The reflection of the luxury debate in literature has been recorded by literary historians. Sekora has given an exhaustive survey of the pre-Augustan classical attacks on luxury as well as the diverse views on the subject by eighteenth-century men of letters. Malcolm Jack's book Corruption & Progress: The Eighteenth-Century Debate discusses in detail the attitudes towards luxury in the works of Bernard Mandeville, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson.²⁴

2. Why women?

As I pointed out above, many male writers have voiced their attitudes towards luxury and their opinions have been accorded due attention. But there is a palpable silence among critics towards female writers' attitudes, in spite of the fact that women writers themselves in eighteenth-century England were by no means reticent on the issue of luxury. Hence I feel it is a subject that deserves to be addressed.

As a matter of fact, in the works of women writers of that period luxury is a recurring subject. Scandal writers such as Mary de la Rivière Manley and Eliza Haywood depict luxury in a vivid way. Mary de la Rivière Manley's The Secret History of Queen Zarah and Zarazians (1705)

²⁴ Malcolm Jack, Corruption & Progress: The Eighteenth-Century Debate (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

fictionalizes what Manley believed was the corruption, the luxurious way of life and sexual licence of the English court people, namely, Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, and her followers. In New Atalantis (1709), another scandal fiction of hers, Manley comments on the effects of luxury:

Did Mankind confine themselves only to what was necessary, reasonable, or proper, there would indeed be no occasion for most part of the great Expence they are at; the Oar might lie at rest in its native Bed; Navigation would be useless; Diamonds, and other precious Stones, secure in their Quarry; the sea not ransack'd for Pearl, since, in the equal Distribution of the Creation, every Country is sufficient to itself for sustaining Life with Temperance, tho'not with Luxury.²⁵

Eliza Haywood in her secret histories and scandal novels also attacks the various aspects of luxury. For example, her Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the Court of Carimania (1727) presents an indictment of the royal voluptuousness in court life. The story is about the numerous amorous affairs of Theodore, Prince of Carimania, a

²⁵ Mary de la Rivière Manley, Secret Memoirs and Manners of several Persons of Quality, of Both Sexes from the New Atlantis, an Island in the Mediterranean, Written Originally in Italian 2 vols. (London, 1709) 1: 89.

royal rake. Her story The Adventures of Eovaai (1736) attacks Robert Walpole's private as well as public life. Walpole is satirized in the story of Ochihatou, Prime Minister of Hypotofa. Ochihatou disguises his lust and ambition before he comes to power. Once he gains complete ascendancy over the king, he seizes the public treasure, builds a stately palace for himself and indulges himself in luxuries, including numerous wives and concubines.

Needless to say, didactic women writers like Jane Barker, Penelope Aubin and Mary Davys spared no pains in promoting puritan values that are the antithesis of luxury. Jane Barker's Exilius: or, The Banish'd Roman (1715) is, as the subtitle "Written after the manner of Télémachus" implies, like Fénelon's Télémaque (1699-1700), an anti-luxury didactic romance. In Exilius Barker praises primitivism as being infinitely superior to the vices of the fashionable world. Exilius, the hero of the title, has been brought up by his father in absolute isolation on an otherwise uninhabited island near Sardinia. He by chance visited the outside world and won great military glory but returns to the island unseduced by material corruptions. Similarly, Penelope Aubin's pietistic tales The Life of Madame de Beaumont (1721) and The Life of Charlotta Du Pont (1723), emphasize the importance of leading a Christian life. Madame de Beaumont and her daughter Belinda live in a retreat virtuously until the arrival of Glandore, the

libertine from London. Virtue passes a series of tests in the vile outside world and finally triumphs. Francis Sheridan's Oriental tale The History of Nourjahad (1767) attacks luxury specifically, and exposes the corrupting effect it has on human morality. The story is about Nourjahad, who wishes for inexhaustible wealth and eternal life. The sultan creates the illusion that his wishes are fulfilled. As a consequence Nourjahad degenerates through indulgence in luxury into a tyrant and murderer. His misfortune increases as his indulgence in sensuous pleasures deepens. Finally Nourjahad is brought to despise riches and luxury and becomes regenerated. The above-mentioned stories indicate that luxury is a favorite theme with eighteenth-century female authors. Because of the limitation of the length of this dissertation, I cannot deal with them all in detail.

It is also noticeable that in the history of the cultural representation of luxury, luxury is regarded as predominantly a female attribute. J. A. Pocock observes that before the nineteenth century, all the figures associated with economics are feminized:

Economic man as masculine conquering hero is a fantasy of nineteenth-century industrialization (the Communist Manifesto is of course one classical example). His eighteenth-century predecessor was seen as on the whole a feminized,

even an effeminate being, still wrestling with his own passions and hysterias and with interior and exterior forces let loose by his fantasies and appetites, and symbolized by such archetypically female goddesses of disorder as Fortune, Luxury, and most recently Credit herself. Pandora came before Prometheus: first, because to pursue passions and be victimised by them was traditionally seen as a female role, or as one which subjected masculine virtu to feminine fortuna; and second, because the new speculative image of economic man was opposed to the essentially paternal and Roman figure of the citizen patriot. Therefore, in the eighteenth-century debate over the new relations of polity to economy, production and exchange are regularly equated with the ascendancy of the passions and the female principle.²⁶

As Sekora points out, almost all the personifications of luxury in English literature, with the major exception of the Faerie Queene, are feminine:

Prudentius in the *Psychomachia* depicts
Luxuria as a beautiful woman astride a

²⁶ J. A. Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 114.

splendid chariot. She has perfumed hair, graceful and languishing airs; her car is made of gold, silver and precious stones. In her train come Amor, Jocus and Petulantia. Unlike the other vices, she enters battle unarmed, violets and rose petals her only defense; and against her alone the virtues seem confused. At last Sobrietas steps in front of the chariot with the sign of the cross, the horses rear, the car upsets, and Luxuria falls groveling in the mire, to be killed by Sobrietas with a single blow. Thereafter the portrayal of Luxuria as a lustful woman is continued in Jean de Meun, Langland, Dante and Chaucer. In Doctor Faustus, Marlowe makes luxury the only female sin. The personification became a favorite device of Romanesque sculptors in the south of France and was carried over to the great Gothic cathedrals of France, Germany and England, and later, in a figure by Cellini, into the ducal palace of Venice. In early illustrations of the Roman de la Rose, as in the windows of Notre Dame, Chartres, and Amiens, she appears carrying the comb and mirror of cupidity and self-love; in some

places she also holds a scepter to mark her omnipotence and sexual domination over men. Elsewhere she is less attractive.²⁷

Luxury is nearly always related to the concept of "effeminacy" as opposed to the masculine implication of "virtue" (virility). Bolingbroke, for example, more than once warned that luxury was effeminating and detrimental to the national morality, whereas national and personal virtues were the strength and sustenance of the body politic. Englishmen, in his opinion, were rapidly following the Romans in becoming corrupt and impotent, since they drowned themselves in luxury. As I mentioned above, eighteenth-century writers such as Swift and Pope depicted women as the embodiment of luxury and corruption. Gary Kelly makes the observation that women were often portrayed as the chief instigators of the excessive consumption, or luxury, that would inhibit capital accumulation and investment necessary to the maintenance and development of the estate.²⁸

Recent feminist critics tend to emphasize the importance of considering the politics of difference. A brief glance at contemporary feminist criticisms would easily support this claim. French feminists such as Xavière

²⁷ Sekora 44-5.

²⁸ Gary Kelly, "Bluestocking Feminism: Providence and Political Economy in Millenium Hall", unpublished article.

Gauthier, Marguerite Duras, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray believe that in a patriarchal society the structure of language is phallogentric; therefore women develop a feminine language which is different from the male language--l'écriture féminine (women's writing).²⁹ Although I am not dealing with the stylistic feature of l'écriture féminine in eighteenth-century women writers' critique of luxury in this thesis, I do argue that the women I discuss have a discourse of their own, which is different from that of their male contemporaries. American feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Patricia Meyer Spacks and Elaine Showalter, upon examining the portrayal of women, expose the patriarchal ideology inscribed in the literary tradition. They are interested in the general concerns, images and recurring themes such as madness, disease and the demonic that are present in women's literature ("a literature of their own," as it is called by Showalter). British feminist critics, such as Michèle Barrett, Juliet Mitchell, Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, on the other hand, relate women's texts or texts about women more to the historical process that conditions them. Despite their differences in focus, all point towards the politics of difference in

²⁹ Xavière Gauthier, "Existe-t-il une écriture de femme?" trans. Marilyn A. August, New French Feminisms: An Anthology eds. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) 161-4.

female writings.

Felicity Nussbaum observes that "As eighteenth-century scholars, we are at the very beginning of finding ways to hold a multiplicity of differences in play"³⁰ The women writers I have selected to discuss here do have opinions regarding luxury very different from those of their male contemporaries. It must be pointed out that they are not really "feminist" in the word's modern sense; even Mary Wollstonecraft, the most radical of them all, could only work out her theory within a patriarchal framework. Sarah Scott, the advocate of matriarchal utopia, is still conservative in her notion of female virtue.³¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's advice to her daughter follows the male chauvinist attitude that women should conceal their knowledge if they have any. Hannah More's ideal woman portrayed in Coelebs in Search of a Wife is only another version, though much less complex, of Richardson's exemplary Clarissa. Nevertheless, the female writers I discuss in the following chapters represent a difference from their male counterparts: these women did not consider their sex the embodiment of luxury. On the contrary, they tried to change

³⁰ Felicity Nussbaum, "The Politics of Difference," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1990): 377.

³¹ Melinda Alliker Rabb has different views on Scott's conservatism, though. See Melinda Alliker Rabb, "Making and Rethinking the Canon: General Introduction and the Case of Millennium Hall" Modern Language Studies 18 (1988): 3-16.

the image of women from conspicuous consumer to that of a wise consumer and reformer of social manners.

Eighteenth-century men and women writers saw the education (moral reform) of women as a key to cultural and social transformation. As Barbara Schnorrenberg points out, "Education has also been regarded by most feminists as the starting point for improving the status of women in any society. The eighteenth century was no exception; reform of education for women was regarded as essential by both conservatives and radicals."³² However, from 1660 to 1800, female education was still very much neglected. In "Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life" (1705) Lady Damaris Masham points out that parents deliberately kept their daughters from anything approaching "learning" out of apprehension that, should they manifest any fluency in a learned language or be "conversant" in books, they might well fail to find husbands.³³ In A Father's Legacy to His Daughters (1774) John Gregory maintains that women are only designed to "soften the hearts

³² Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, "A Paradise like Eve's," Women's Studies 2 (1982): 264.

³³ Lady Damaris Masham, "Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life" (London, 1705) in Angeline Goreau, The Whole Duty of a Woman (New York: The Dial Press, 1985) 29-30.

and polish the manners of men."³⁴ Obviously he did not think women's education would be of any use apart from pleasing men. Although the late eighteenth century saw the first female academies established, the curricula were designed to produce ornamental wives, not political leaders. The classics, the basic ingredient of male education, were ignored in favor of more practical courses: a little French; a taste of the arts--music, painting, and fine sewing; enough mathematics to do household accounts; enough English to write a badly spelled letter. The primary emphasis was on ladylike behavior in society.³⁵ In the works of the four female authors I am going to discuss here, the benefit of education is a theme that is closely related to combating the corruption of luxury, although each of them has a different focus. Hence, a brief discussion of their views of female education as it relates to luxury is included in each chapter.

In terms of methodology, I apply Marxist (or Marxian, the nuance being that the former is sometimes associated with the "orthodox" classical Marxism) concepts to the female authors I discuss. In spite of their diversity, all

³⁴ John Gregory, A Father's Legacy to his Daughters (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1784) 5.

³⁵ The Female Spectator: English Women Writers Before 1800 eds. Mary R. Mahl and Hélène Koon (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1977) 9.

Marxist theories of literature view literature within a larger framework of social reality. Social reality is not just a background out of which literature emerges. It has a definite shape. This shape is found in history, which consists of class relationships generated by economic production. Moreover, analyzing the subject of luxury leads one to a critique of capitalism. At least Marxist readings are bound to yield important insight into the subject of luxury. Many studies of women's literature focus too much on trans-historical patterns and isolate the texts from the developing material reality that conditions them. In emphasizing the "separateness" and "difference" of women's discourse, critics tend to downplay the fact that women are subjected to changing ideological and material situations as well. I admit that women's struggle against "patriarchal literary authority" is worth attention; but I also feel that due attention should be given to the connection between the text and the historical context in which the text is produced. However, I am aware that Marxism has always been accused of being 'gender-blind,' as pointed out by Heidi Hartmann.³⁶ My effort here is to identify and explore women's views towards luxury in the eighteenth century from

³⁶ Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," quoted by Cora Kaplan, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism eds. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) 147.

the perspective of historical changes in the mode of production and systems of appropriation and exploitation. Naturally, this effort must make special reference to the position of women in a patriarchal society and the impact of this position on their way of thinking.

It must be noted that in the field of literary study Marxist thinking is essentially hybrid. In spite of the fact that all Marxist theories of literature have a common ground that literature should be understood within a framework of social reality, Marxist critics have developed their own theories along different lines. Felicity Nussbaum observes:

The eighteenth century is not imagined to exist as an unmediated thing, but it is rather the result of complex adjudications and analogies, resistances and uncertainties, dissonances and gaps that make the knowledge of the eighteenth century inchoate, yet responsive to our contemporary understandings.³⁷

Although the women writers I discuss here all address luxury, they address it from different perspectives. A monolithic, unified formula of approach to their texts would be simplistic and reductive. Hence I have no scruple in employing different Marxist concepts when discussing

³⁷ Nussbaum 377.

individual texts. Georg Lukács views literature as a reflection of social reality which is a dialectical totality where all the parts are dynamic and contradictory. I find his theory helps us to understand the dialectics in Mary Wollstonecraft's views on luxury. Louis Althusser regards the social reality as a decentralized structure. The various levels within the social formation are not simply reflections of the economic level, but are relatively autonomous. Art has a fictional distance from the ideology which produces it. These ideas I find more applicable to the works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but one need not impose the Althusserian theory on Lady Mary to understand fully her position. Pierre Macherey asserts that literary production is a partial or incoherent rendering of reality. When ideology enters the literary text, gaps and silences appear. Feminist critics have appropriated and extended his theory to their reading of literary texts. In my opinion, Macherey's theory throws light on how Hannah More's works should be viewed and helps to explain the seeming gaps and silences in More's texts. For Fredric Jameson all ideologies are 'strategies of containment'; History (in other words, the reality of economic Necessity) imposes repressions on all the underlying contradictions of social reality. Literary texts are also symptoms of the suppressions of History. Textual heterogeneity can be understood only when it is related to social and cultural

heterogeneity outside the text. The texts of Sarah Scott and Hannah More make more sense when viewed in light of Jameson's thesis. In the application of Marxist concepts to literary study, it is the applicability of certain concepts to certain texts that matters. All the Marxian critics I mentioned above have their "favorite" texts (written by male authors exclusively!) which they think best for the purpose of extrapolating their theories: e.g. Walter Scott and Balzac for Lukács, Verne for Macherey, Brecht for Althusser, Hemingway for Jameson, etc.

3. Why these women?

A fundamental issue here is the selection of primary texts. To what extent are the four female authors I have chosen representative of their time? My principle of selection here is in part based on the accessibility of the texts; meanwhile certain historical representational features such as the early eighteenth century (as represented by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, though her writing activities continued well into the sixties), the middle eighteenth century (as represented by Sarah Robinson Scott) and the late eighteenth century (as represented by the radical Mary Wollstonecraft and the "conservative" Hannah More) are given due consideration. I attend less to the women discussed here as individuals than to the different social categories they represent. As far as marital status

is concerned, most of the women discussed here had either an unhappy marital life (Sarah Scott, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) or stormy relationships with men (Mary Wollstonecraft), Hannah More excepted. In terms of class affiliation, most of them are from the middle class, although Lady Mary belonged to the aristocracy. Ironically, because of the historical situation under which eighteenth-century female authors wrote, it is obvious that only the women of the leisured class were educated well enough to write and were able to afford the luxury of indulging themselves in writing about and reflecting on luxury. It is therefore unrealistic to include any female writers from the lower class (there were, however, a few exceptions such as the proletariat poets Ann Yearsley [Lactilla] and Mary Collier).³⁸ In terms of ideological representation, the four women I have chosen constitute a diverse group: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu the aristocratic patriot, Sarah Scott the female utopianist, Mary Wollstonecraft the bourgeois feminist, and Hannah More the evangelical/utilitarian moralist. Because of the scope of this dissertation, I do not pretend to write a comprehensive history of the luxury debate. Also, my analyses of the literary works discussed here have not sought to elucidate them fully as fictions or

³⁸ See Donna Landry, The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) passim.

familiar letters or political pamphlets or popular chapbooks. Although I do not espouse "political correctness" in my principle of selecting the texts, I concur with the idea of Robert von Hallberg and Terry Eagleton that the literary canon is no longer seen to consist of those works which are most aesthetically pleasing; instead, canons are recognized as the expression of social and political power expressing as yet unestablished interests.³⁹

According to Jameson, history is inaccessible to us except in textual form and it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization.⁴⁰ While treating the texts of the four women writers I am aware that these are not objective historical records so much as textual artifacts "fashioned" (to use the term of New Historicists') by the authors' own interested positions. Consequently I am interested in how the material reality discussed here--the pursuit or denunciation of luxury--is mediated in the texts by language and ideology. I also take care to point out that ideology is not monolithic. For Terry Eagleton, as

³⁹ Robert von Hallberg, "Editor's Introduction," Critical Inquiry 10 (1983): iii. Also Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 11-2.

⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 82.

well as for Lucien Goldmann, "it is not necessarily true by any means that the works of the same author will belong to the same ideology."⁴¹ The women authors I am going to discuss were to some extent engaged in ideological struggles. That is why no unanimous, or even coherent, arguments for luxury have been sustained in these women authors' works. However, it is precisely this kind of struggle that stimulates my curiosity in probing into the luxury controversy.

⁴¹ Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: NLB, 1976) 97.

Chapter I The Quest for a Female Utopia¹:

Sarah Scott's A Description of Millenium Hall

Sarah Scott is not a well-known eighteenth century female writer.² As a matter of fact, she has always been overshadowed by the literary fame of her sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the 'Queen of Blue Stockings,' and her nine books have long been in oblivion. However, her novel A Description of Millenium [sic] Hall is interesting because it is one of the few feminist utopian literary works in the eighteenth century (or to be exact, the first feminist utopian novel, as the other two, Mary Astell's A Serious Proposal and Clara Reeve's Plans of Education³ cannot be classified as novels) that discuss the relationship between luxury and female education, and it deserves critical attention.

A brief sketch of the biography of Scott may help us

¹ I am following the orthography of Webster's Dictionary by using "Utopia" and "utopian".

² The most recent reference to Scott is Elizabeth Bergen Brophy's Women's Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991) which contains sporadic discussions of Scott's novels.

³ Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg discusses these three Utopias briefly in "A Paradise Like Eve's: Three Eighteenth-Century English Female Utopias," Women's Studies 9 (1982): 263-73.

to understand the utopian nature of her work. Sarah Robinson Scott was born in 1723. While she was eighteen, she contracted small-pox, which disfigured her considerably. To make up for her lost physical charm, she devoted most of her lifetime to intellectual pursuit and became quite a learned scholar in history. She married George Lewis Scott in 1751, but was separated from her husband shortly after their marriage. She then lived in Bath with Lady Barbara Montagu, the sister of Lord Halifax, and they started a charitable educational institution similar to that described in A Description of Millenium Hall. They continued to live in that way until the death of Lady Bab (1765). Most of her novels and biographical histories were published between 1750 and 1776. Scott died in 1795.

Undoubtedly, Scott wrote Millenium Hall chiefly out of her own experience of living and working with Lady Bab. Horace Walpole even suggested that Millenium Hall was the work of Scott and Lady Bab in collaboration, though there is no evidence to support this assumption. But Scott's experience was not unique for her time; two Irishwomen, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler, chose to live together in Wales against the will of their families, and they followed a system of self-improvement.⁴ Although there is no

⁴ Jean B. Kern, "The Old Maid, or 'to grow old, and be poor, and laughed at'," Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986) 207.

biographical evidence that Scott had actually visited these two women, it is possible that she had this kind of female communal life in mind while she wrote Millenium Hall.

Millenium Hall was published in 1762. It did not receive much attention among Scott's contemporaries.⁵ Since it is a roman à thèse rather than a novel of plot, all the characters are, in the words of Ernst Bloch (one of the prominent structural Marxian theoreticians of the Frankfurt School), "ideal figures of perfection."⁶ Of course a readership accustomed to Tom Jones or Clarissa did not greet the novel with much enthusiasm. But the lack of artistic appeal should not invalidate our study of Millenium Hall. As Fredric Jameson points out in Marxism and Form, utopian thinking "unites both the philosophical and the artistic impulses; at the same time it transcends both: it is philosophy become concrete, it is art which takes as its

⁵ However, an article on the Monthly Review did praise the didactic content of A Description of Millenium Hall:

These are the outlines of a work well calculated, as the title justly professes, to inspire the reader with proper sentiments of humanity, and the love of virtue. We have perused it with pleasure; and heartily recommend it, as a very entertaining as well as truly moral and sensible performance.

See Walter M. Crittenden, The Life and Writings of Mrs. Sarah Scott (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1932) 57-8.

⁶ Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) 135.

object not products and works but life itself."⁷ This thesis concentrates on the following aspects of Millenium Hall: 1. Scott's attitude towards luxury as reflected in her utopian vision of society; 2. Scott's views on luxury in relation to the contemporary European intellectual milieu; and 3. Scott's idea of female education as an effective remedy for luxury and corruption.

1. Scott's utopian vision in Millenium Hall

A brief synopsis of Millenium Hall will help to illustrate the utopian nature of the novel. The male narrator is obliged to stay in a country house called Millenium Hall for a few days, and he records the stories of the five lady-residents. The stories fall into the analogical pattern discussed by Eric Rothstein in his analysis of Rasselas.⁸ All the five ladies in Millenium Hall--Mrs. Morgan, Miss Mancel, Lady Mary Jones, Miss Selvyn and Miss Trentham--are more or less disillusioned by fashionable society and by men. Choosing the life of celibacy, they retire to Millenium Hall and make it a charitable educational institution for women.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 111.

⁸ Eric Rothstein, Systems of Order and Inquiry in Later Eighteenth-Century Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 23-61.

In his essay "Introduction/Prospectus: To Reconsider the Relationship of Marxism to Utopian Thought"⁹ Fredric Jameson gives a brief summary of how utopian thinking is viewed in the context of Marxism. Especially interesting is his enunciation of Ernst Bloch's assertion that utopian thought is a "hope principle" or "inauthentic future" in which the projector asks for fulfilment in a world at all points identical to that of the present, save for the possession of the particular object desired and presently lacking. This is actually a reiteration of Jameson's earlier discussion of Bloch in Marxism and Form.¹⁰ Millenium Hall--Scott's female Utopia--is a projection of this "hope principle" or "inauthentic future" as an alternative to a society corrupted by luxury and conspicuous consumption. It also is a projection of Scott's ideal for a women's educational agenda: the education of women on the issues of managing and developing estates, maintaining the social welfare of the laboring class, and inhibiting excessive consumption--the supposedly masculine abilities in a society of capitalist production.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the eighteenth century was an age that saw the rapid development of gentry

⁹ Fredric Jameson, "Introduction/Prospectus: To Reconsider the Relationship of Marxism to Utopian Thought", Minnesota Review 6 (1976): 53-8.

¹⁰ Jameson, Marxism and Form 126.

or agrarian capitalism. The issue of luxury was invariably connected with the development of trade and commerce.

Generally speaking, the Tories were strongly opposed to the new directions in trade and commerce while the Whigs were in favor of them.¹¹ There is no biographic evidence that Scott was a strong Tory, but it is obvious that she shared the Tory hostility towards trade. In Millenium Hall she creates a communal agrarian society which is a totally self-enclosed and functional domain where no money changes hands. As the inhabitants of Millenium Hall raise their own poultry, grow their own vegetables and enforce a co-operative system of exchanging labour, the use of money becomes unnecessary. The ladies also establish a manufacture workshop among the poor, but since they are not interested in trade, they pay higher wages than the profits they make from selling manufactured goods. It is emphasized throughout the novel that commercial profit is not the concern of the inhabitants of Millenium Hall. The "manager", Mrs. Morgan, says,

We then dedicated that sum [the donations from the lady residents in Millenium Hall] to the establishment of a manufacture, but since the fourth year it has much more than paid its expences, though in many respects we do

¹¹ This general view is challenged by Thomas Keith Meier in Defoe and the Defense of Commerce (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1987).

not act, with the economy usual in such cases, but give very high wages, for our design being to serve a multitude of poor destitute of work, we have no nice regard to profit. As we did not mean to drive a trade, we have been at a loss what to do with the profits. ¹² (emphasis added)

This idea of a self-sufficient economy is, of course, not new in the eighteenth century. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe gives a far more detailed description of that kind of economy much earlier than Millenium Hall. What seems interesting is that in Millenium Hall this kind of production has basically changed the social relation in commercial exchange. In Robinson Crusoe, at least in the earlier part of the novel, there is an isolated individual world without the existence of active social relationships. But the fact that Millenium Hall is a community, a microcosm of society, or in Jameson's term of Utopia, the "microscopic work within the smallest cells of the vast universe itself,"¹³ makes this kind of self-sufficient economy significant. Scott may be the first English woman to

¹² Sarah Scott, A Description of Millenium Hall, ed. Walter M. Crittenden (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955) 76-7. All subsequent references to A Description of Millenium Hall are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

¹³ Jameson, Marxism and Form 121.

propose an economic model which bears resemblance to the later socialist economic one. It also should be noted that in terms of female education, this kind of self-reliant economy is in line with that of the early educational theorists who recommended Robinson Crusoe over Defoe's other works because they thought women were likely to learn to desire what Crusoe accomplished, a self-enclosed and functional domain where money did not really matter. As Nancy Armstrong points out, "It was no doubt because Crusoe was more female, according to the nineteenth century understanding of gender, than either Roxana or Moll that educators found his story more suitable reading for girls than for boys of an impressionable age."¹⁴ So the self-sufficient economy in Millenium Hall fits in well with Scott's contemporary ideal of womanhood.

However, although Scott endeavors to create a trade-free, self-sufficient and luxury-free female Utopia, she cannot convincingly demonstrate how this model would work without trading with the outside world. For example, the carpet and rug business operated by the fund of Miss Trentham obviously cannot thrive without a market in the world outside Millenium Hall: "in the parish a manufacture of carpets and rugs . . . has succeeded so well as to enrich all the country round about"(201). Gary Kelly observes that

¹⁴ Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 16.

this kind of economy is capitalist, patriarchal, but humanized or rather feminized.¹⁵ Also, the financial source of Millenium Hall gives further evidence that such an enterprise would not be possible if its basic funds were not contributed by the the inheritances of the five residents, (Mrs. Mancel's 40,000 pounds, Lady Mary Jones's 10,000 pounds, Mrs. Selvyn's 15,000 pounds, Mrs. Trentham's 15,000 pounds, and Mrs. Morgan's 8,000 pounds) plus the Millenium Hall property and yearly rent income of 1,400 pounds. The community reflects what Jameson points out in his interpretation of Bloch: since an Utopia is just a vision of hope, the "inauthentic future", the projector only conjures up what he/she wants, and holds the rest in suspension:

Such effects are primitive or infantile to the degree that they amount to magical incantations, a conjuring up of the object in question just exactly as we long for it, at the same time that we hold the rest of the world, and our own desire, magically in suspension, arresting all change and very passage of real time itself.¹⁶

Like all utopianists, Scott conjures up the self-sufficient economy without mapping out how this kind of economy per se

¹⁵ Gary Kelly, "Bluestocking Feminism: Providence and Political Economy in Millenium Hall", unpublished essay, 17.

¹⁶ Jameson, Marxism and Form 126-7.

is going to survive.

From the detailed financial contributions listed above, one can see that the negation of private ownership is an effective way of eliminating luxury.¹⁷ In the society of Millenium Hall, private property no longer exists. The fortunes of the inhabitants are pooled (Scott and Lady Bab pooled their incomes together). Each member of the community has to deposit whatever fortune she owns, and if anyone hides part of her fortune, she is expelled from Millenium Hall. (This idea of the elimination of private property as an effective means of preventing luxury and vice also marks William Morris's utopian socialist novel News from Nowhere.)

The antagonism against trade and commercial expansion usually leads to primitivism, a form that the propaganda against luxury often takes. Alan McKillop points out that the propaganda against luxury often took a primitivistic form. This might be just a heightening of the

¹⁷ In his enunciation of Marx's theory of the relation between private ownership and conspicuous consumption, H. P. Adams points out,

Private property has so maimed and blunted human consciousness that people can think of their relation to the world only in the form of possession, not as a relation of physical and spiritual enjoyment...Within the system of private property a man's needs are the means by which his neighbour impoverishes him by inducing him to spend. The more need my neighbour has of the commodities I can supply, the more of his labor must he sacrifice to me.

(H. P. Adams, Karl Marx, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1940, 112-3.)

impulse that leads people to praise the simpler life of their forefathers, or it might be extended into an attack on civilized society.¹⁸ Scott's views against luxury are a combination of the primitivism referred to by McKillop and Rita Felski. Taking a perspective of Romantic feminist aesthetics, Rita Felski points out that Romantic feminist texts reflect a nostalgic yearning for a prelapsarian innocence. The lyrical voices of women and nature usually speak in unison:

The Romantic feminist vision is the product of a psychological and aesthetic (rather than political) conception of liberation, less concerned with strategic means for ending the oppression of women than with expressing a paradisaic longing for harmony fueled by a revulsion against the conditions of life under contemporary capitalism.¹⁹

Here Felski is chiefly referring to the presence of a Romantic feminism in twentieth-century capitalist society. But, as a feminist Utopia Millenium Hall does have a romantic vision that opposes the materialistic world

¹⁸ Alan Dugald McKillop, English Literature: from Dryden to Burns (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948) 362.

¹⁹ Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989) 148.

corrupted by luxury.

Feminist Utopias have much in common with the traditional genre of the pastoral idyll, as Anne Mellor observes. Many feminists yearn for a separatist, all-female community whose members live in loving harmony with each other and with nature. These feminists view the industrial and especially the technological development within a hierarchical political organization as morally corrupt and inherently self-destructive.²⁰ The female Utopia in Millenium Hall is one in harmony with nature, and one that opposes commercial expansion and imperialist exploitation as being closely related to luxury. From the very beginning of the novel the reader is told that the male narrator has made his fortune in the British colony, Jamaica, but he also becomes unhealthy and eager to seek an early retirement, ideally after the fashion of the female residents of Millennium Hall. The implicit irony here is that one can afford to indulge in utopian contemplation only after one has made a fortune through all these anti-utopian activities, such as the sugar trade and slave labor, activities associated with colonial exploitation.

Mrs. Mancel, the mentor-figure of the novel, asserts that it is vain and unnatural of man to want to possess the native products of another climate and another country

²⁰ Anne Mellor, "Of Feminist Utopias," Women's Studies 3 (1982): 259.

(meaning exotic animals like lions, tigers, leopards, etc.):

. . . to see a man, from a vain desire to have in his possession the native of another climate and another country, reduce a fine and noble creature to misery, and confine him within narrow inclosures whose happiness consisted in unbounded liberty, shocks my nature. . . .(22-3)

So man's desire for material possession is regarded as perverting nature, which is seen as both feminine and primitivistic, as is described in the following passage:

The thick shade they [the bushes] afforded us, the fragrance wafted from the woodbines with which they [the bushes] were encircled, was so delightful. . . that we strolled on, desirous of approaching the house to which this avenue led. . . the eye is so charmed with the remarkable verdure and neatness of the fields, with the beauty of the flowers which are planted all round them, and seem to mix with the quickest hedges, that time steals away insensibly.

When we had walked about half a mile in a scene truly pastoral, we began to think ourselves in the days of Theocritus, so sweetly did the sound of a flute come wafted through the air. Never did

pastoral swain make sweeter melody on his oaten
reed. . . . (4-5, emphasis added)

Here we have the Jamesonian view of an utopian ideal which is "obliged to realize its projections of the future under the cloak of a mystique of nostalgia."²¹ Not only the nostalgia for the Golden Age is evoked ("the days of Theocritus," "pastoral," "reed". . .) but also the flux of time is interrupted to indicate a sense of timelessness. The ambiguity of verbal tense is worth our attention. In this passage the verbal tense is inconsistent, denoting a "past-present-past" pattern: "afforded. . . wafted. . . were. . . was. . . strolled. . . led. . . is. . . are. . . seem. . . steal. . . walked. . . began". One is led to assume that this violation of verbal tense is intentionally employed to treat disparate units of time as if they were a homogeneous continuum. The time span indicates a combination of generalized states which may last forever ("time steals away insensibly") or be the experience of a few moments. This treatment of time is typically primitivistic, for both anthropologists and primitivist writers have emphasized the radically different sense of time in a world of primitive subjectivity.²² In The

²¹ Jameson, Marxism and Form 156.

²² Michael Bell, Primitivism (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972) 15.

Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Ernest Cassirer points out that mythical consciousness and feeling are a kind of biological time, a rhythmic ebb and flow of life, that precedes the intuition of a properly cosmic time.²³ So by the use of mixed verbal tenses, Scott creates a sense of indeterminacy; the fixed, objective time is replaced by undetermined subjective time. Moreover, from a Marxist point of view, this intentional use of indeterminacy of time indicates a revolutionary impulse. Herbert Marcuse, a structuralist Marxian theoretician of the Frankfurt School, asserts that "the struggle against time becomes a decisive moment in the struggle against domination."²⁴ Walter Benjamin, another theoretician of the same school, says, "The conscious wish to break the continuum of history belongs to the revolutionary classes in the moment of action."²⁵ Scott's efforts to halt the flux of time in Millenium Hall thus imply a longing, conscious or unconscious, for breaking the continuum of male-dominant history and replacing it with the

²³ Ernest Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, trans. Ralph Manheim, (New Haven: University of Connecticut Press, 1957) 108-9.

²⁴ Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1956) 233.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Ueber den Begriff der Geschichte," Die Neue Rundschau (1950) 568., quoted by Marcuse in Eros and Civilization 233.

vision of a prelapsarian feminist Utopia.

Moreover, in his discussion of primitivism, Bell points out, "The three most important features of the primitive world view are animism, natural piety, and the rituals through which they are expressed."²⁶ In the above-quoted passage from Millenium Hall the world of the narrator progresses from a rational one into one of natural piety-- "When we had walked about half a mile in a scene truly pastoral, we began to think ourselves in the days of Theocritus." Meanwhile the natural world surrounding the narrator becomes animated. So towards the end of the passage the subjective world of the narrator and the objective world merge. The "we" at first is rational, but as the sensory organs are so enchanted by the surrounding world, they unconsciously merge with the outer reality: "the eye is so charmed. . . we began to think ourselves in the days of Theocritus. . . we continued motionless, listening to his music." At the same time the description of the objective world surrounding the narrator is also by degrees animated: "Some [flowers] had no other defence than hedges of rose trees and sweet-briars, various other flowers seemed to grow under their protection. . . Such flowers. . . were defended with roses and sweet-briars, whose thorns preserved them from all attacks." This is typically a feminist

²⁶ Bell 11.

utopian garden which sees the perfect harmony of human beings and nature.

Marcuse points out that it is a "general maternal attitude" if "nature is taken, not as an object of domination and exploitation but as a 'garden' which can grow while making human beings grow."²⁷ He also cites Margaret Mead's interpretation of Arapesh culture as an example:

To the Arapesh, the world is a garden that must be tilled, not for one's self, not in pride and boasting, not for hoarding and usury, but that the yams and dogs and the pigs and most of all the children may grow. From this whole attitude flow many of the other Arapesh traits, the lack of conflict between the old and young, the lack of any expectation of jealousy or envy, the emphasis upon co-operation.²⁸

In much the same vein, Scott depicts the harmonious, peaceful co-existence of human beings and animals in Millenium Hall, as opposed to the post-lapsarian world where human beings exploit and destroy animals for their own luxurious consumption:

The wood is well peopled with pheasants, wild

²⁷ Marcuse 216.

²⁸ Margaret Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (New York: New American Library, 1952) 100., as quoted by Marcuse.

turkies, squirrels and hares, who live so unmolested, that they seem to have forgot all fear, and rather to welcome than fly those who come amongst them. Man never appears there as a merciless destroyer; but the preserver, instead of the tyrant of the inferior part of the creation. While they continue in that wood, none but natural evil can approach them, and from that they are defended as much as possible. We there 'walked joint tenant of the shade,' with the animal race; and a perfect equality in nature's bounty seems enjoyed by the whole creation. One could scarcely forbear thinking those happy times were come, when 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a young child shall lead them. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.' (21, emphasis added)

Here the human being, previously the symbol of luxury and destruction, is converted into the role of preserver in this female garden. Moreover, the biblical quotation is taken

from a description of the future Messiah in Isaiah (Isaiah 11: 6), in whose reign there would be a return to the conditions of the primeval paradise, when, it was believed, all creatures had lived in peace together.²⁹ Scott's condemnation of luxury is implied in her choosing this particular biblical passage, because in Isaiah there is wide condemnation of the greed of the landowners and their oppression of the poor; of the luxury among the women, and of the corruption of the civil and religious leaders of the central government (Isaiah 3). The prophet in Isaiah foresees disaster behind the luxurious festivity (Isaiah 22), denounces social and moral wickedness (Isaiah 28), and points out that there must be righteousness, fair-dealing, justice for all and less luxury (Isaiah 3,4, 32).

Primitivists uphold the doctrine that if people remain closer to nature and less subject to the influence of society, they are nobler and more nearly perfect than civilized peoples.³⁰ The theme of retirement and return to nature is recurrent in Millenium Hall. The inhabitants are described as "concealing their virtues in retirement" (1). However, while emphasizing that seclusion from the outside

²⁹ Christopher R. North, "The Book of Isaiah," The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary, eds. G. H. Davies, A. Richardson, C. L. Wallis, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955) 268.

³⁰ C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1982) 349.

society is an effective way of resisting temptation and corruption and is conducive to eternal happiness, Scott does not advocate passive retreat from the outer world as the term 'retirement' usually implies. In Millenium Hall we do not find the monkish virtues such as meditation, forbearance, and penitence; instead, charitable work and female education are advocated, which makes Scott's proposed way of retreat far more systematic and active than Mary Astell's proposal of establishing a female institution for retirement (though Mary Astell did mention "doing good to others" casually in her proposal).³¹ Rather, the principle of utility is emphasized throughout the novel.

Utility is another important aspect of all utopian systems. Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse lays considerable emphasis on utility, as the famous quotation from Wolmar makes clear: "Jettez les yeux tout autour de vous. . . vous n'y verrez que des choses utiles. . . ." ³² In Millenium Hall the inhabitants do not value things for their rarity or

³¹ Mary Astell, an early feminist English writer, in 1694 wrote A Serious Proposal advocating a convent-like institution of retirement for women outside marriage. See Mary Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest (London: R. Wilkins, 1701)

³² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964) 2: 549. Subsequent citations from the works of Rousseau are references to this edition and hereafter will be identified by volume and page number.

pecuniary value:

As these ladies have no taste but what is directed by good sense, nothing found a place here from being only uncommon, for they think few things are very rare but because they are little desirable; and indeed it is plain they are free from that littleness of mind, which makes people value a thing the more for its being possessed by no one but themselves.(14)

By praising the aesthetics of the ladies in Millenium Hall Scott directs her attack on the luxury of the gentry. According to the theory of the leisure class, the possession of rare, rather than serviceable, things is a sign of respectability. Veblen observes in The Theory of the Leisure Class that objects are beautiful and valuable only when they can be appropriated or monopolised. And their exclusive enjoyment gratifies the possessor's sense of pecuniary superiority at the same time that their contemplation gratifies his sense of beauty. "Great as is the sensuous beauty of gems, their rarity and price adds an expression of distinction to them, which they would never have if they were cheap."³³ Of course, the toilette of Pope's Belinda is too familiar an embodiment of this theory

³³ Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1899) 130.

of luxury to need further elaboration.³⁴

However, paradoxically, Scott's "utility" aesthetics is also typical of the functionalism that would become so valued in the age of industrialization. Hence, Scott tries to dissociate herself from the capitalist world around her (as Millenium Hall is an isolated Utopia) yet unconsciously identifies herself with it. In The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, a Marxist analysis of artistic forms, Ernst Bloch argues that the emphasis on usefulness and the functional form of art (applied art) is typical of the spirit of the machine age (the age of industrialization) and is opposed to the expressive exuberance of pure art.³⁵ So, while opposing the aesthetic theory of conspicuous consumption, Scott also adopts the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie. Her Romantic feminist aesthetics (the

³⁴ Unnumber'd treasure ope at once, and here
 The various off'rings of the world appear;
 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
 And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil,
 This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
 The Tortoise here and elephant unite,
 Transform'd to combs, the speckled and the white.
 (Alexander Pope, "The Rape of the Lock" Canto I, ll. 129-36.)

Both Laura Brown and Louis A. Landa have given this subject detailed treatment. See Laura Brown, Alexander Pope, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) 6-45. Also Louis A. Landa, "Pope's Belinda, The General Emporia of the World, and the Wondrous Worm," Essays in Eighteenth-Century English Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 179-99.

³⁵ Bloch 80-4.

exuberance and harmony with nature) is curiously blended with the cold touch of the age of industrialization /capitalization.

2. Scott's views on luxury in relation to the contemporary European intellectual milieu

Scott's proposal of establishing an utopian society to eradicate luxury is situated in the eighteenth-century European intellectual fabric. Raymond Ruyer has pointed out in L'Utopie et les Utopies that the eighteenth century is "le siècle classique de l'utopie."³⁶ John Locke's tabula rasa theory, which is indirectly referred to at the very beginning of Millenium Hall, sets the philosophical basis for the belief in the perfectibility of man and the canon of progress. Leibniz mentions Utopia in his Théodicée (1710).³⁷ Following the notion raised by Thomas More's Utopia (1516), Fénelon in his quasi-epic Télémaque (1699) creates a utopian society where simplicity, naturalness and innocence dominate and all luxuries, such as expensive clothing, rich furnishings, and the related avarice in the

³⁶ Raymond Ruyer, L'Utopie et les Utopies (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) 187.

³⁷ Leibniz, "Il est vrai qu'on peut s'imaginer des mondes possibles, sans péché et sans malheur, et qu'on en pourrait faire comme des Romans, des Utopies, des Sévarambles...." ("Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine de Mal," Oeuvres, Paris: Charpentier, 1846, 2: 116.)

pursuit of wealth cannot exist. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse presents a utopian social model almost identical with Millenium Hall. We can find the same economic self-sufficiency, rusticity, isolation, utility and harmony in the four utopian models as described by Rousseau.³⁸ Nevertheless, Scott's luxury-proof Utopia is unique in its class structure and anti-patriarchal system, which are very different from those proposed by Rousseau and other utopian writers. These features will be discussed in the following sections.

Eighteenth-century attitudes towards luxury are usually related to class-consciousness. Moralists were concerned about servants forgetting their place and imitating their superiors. McKillop makes the following comments:

A. . this led to incessant moralizing about luxury among high and low. Servants no longer knew their place, country people dressed like city people and drank tea every day, and laborers ate meat more than once a week-such

³⁸ It is interesting to note that La Nouvelle Héloïse made its appearance in Paris in February, 1761, and according to Walter M. Crittenden, Millenium Hall was composed between late 1761 and the beginning of 1762. But Scott was not in Paris while writing Millenium Hall, although we do not know whether she had by any chance come across the English translation of La Nouvelle Héloïse, which was published in April, 1761. However, the proximity in publishing time suggests that these two works are fruits of congenial philosophical seeds rather than pure coincidence.

were the complaints of those concerned with public morals.³⁹

Scott's contemporary, Henry Fielding, sees the insubordination of the poor and the desire for luxury as the cause of crime:

I think that the vast torrent of luxury which the late years hath poured itself into this nation, hath greatly contributed to produce among many others, the mischief I here complain of. I aim not here to satirize the great, among whom luxury is probably rather a moral than a political evil. But vices, no more than diseases will stop with them. . . in free countries, at least, it is a brand of liberty claimed by the people to be wicked as profligate as their superiors . . . It reaches the very dregs of the people, who aspiring still to a degree beyond that which belongs to them, and not being able by the fruits of honest labour to support the state which they affect, they disdain the wages to which their industry would entitle them; and abandoning themselves to idleness, the more simple and poor spirited betake themselves to

³⁹ McKillop 113.

a state of starving and beggary, while those
of more art and courage become thieves,
sharpers and robbers.⁴⁰

In Tom Jones the servants' aping of their superiors is considered both immoral and ridiculous. Molly Seagrim, dressed in Sophia Western's gown, is laughed at by the congregation in the church. Jenny, dressed in a new silk gown with a laced cap, provokes the angry neighbourhood. For Fielding and his contemporaries luxury and insubordination in the lower class threatened social stability and hence were more dangerous than the luxury and debauchery in the upper class.⁴¹

Although Millenium Hall is seemingly a Utopia totally free from the evils of a commercialized society, the class hierarchy basically remains the same as that of the outer world. Paradoxically, while maintaining her idea of

⁴⁰ Henry Fielding, Enquiry into the Cause of the Late Increase of Robbers (London: 1751) 3.

⁴¹ Similarly, Defoe, in The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd (1724) complained that the habits of the rich had corrupted the poor by making them discontented. Hannah More also lectures in her Cheap Repository Tracts on the importance of the poor keeping their own places and not imitating the rich. William Wood, in A Survey of Trade (1718) points out:

Where riot and luxuries are not discountenanc'd,
the inferior rank of men, become presently
infected, and grow lazy, effeminate, impatient of
labor, and expensive, and consequently cannot
thrive by trade, tillage, and planting.
(William Wood, A Survey of Trade, London: 1718, 158.)

primitive communalism, Scott shares her age's class-snobishness in her attack on luxury in the lower class. The poor are depicted as ignorant and quarrelsome and in need of being taught Christian ethics; the upper-middle class should take care that the lower-class does not follow their example in conspicuous consumption. Any potential dissatisfaction or rebellion is suppressed in Millenium Hall. When the old woman complains of the exploitation of the absentee landlords, she is told that "everyone has faults" and she should learn to be forbearing and patient (15-6). As Jane Spencer notices, the ladies in Millenium Hall have "patronising attitudes" towards the lower-class which grate on the reader and which remind one of Jane Austen's Lady Catherine de Bourgh.⁴² Class hierarchy, if not totalitarianism, is maintained in Millenium Hall. So Scott never relinquishes her conservative eighteenth-century notion that class subordination is absolute and unconditional. It should also be noted that in Scott's utopian system she does not, as her contemporary Rousseau does, regard equality as a necessity for her utopian class structure.⁴³ As a matter of fact, the

⁴² Jane Spencer, Introduction. A Description of Millenium Hall. By Sarah Scott (1762; London: Virago Press, 1986) xiii.

⁴³ In La Nouvelle Héloïse Saint-Preux observes with approbation while visiting the Valais:
Ils en usent entre eux avec la même simplicité; les enfants en âge de raison sont les égaux de leurs

class hierarchy is perpetuated through Millenium Hall's education system. The inhabitants of Millenium Hall have taken some measures which are designed to discourage luxury in the poor. The girls of 'humble rank' are permitted to be with the ladies at breakfast and dinner, but they are constantly reminded of their subordinate status:

The girls you see sit in the room with us are all they have at present in that way; they are educated in such a manner as will render them acceptable, where accomplished women of an humble rank and behaviour are wanted, either for the care of a house or children. These girls are never out of the room with us, except at breakfast and dinner, and after eight o'clock in the evening, at which times they are under the immediate care of the house-keeper, with whom they are allowed to walk out for an hour or two every fine day; lest their being always in our company should make them think their situation above a menial state; they attend us while we are dressing, and we endeavour that the time they are thus employed shall not pass without

pères, les domestiques s'asseyent à table avec leurs maîtres; la même liberté règne dans les maisons et dans la république, et la famille est l'image de l'Etat. (Rousseau 2: 81.)

improvement. They are clad coarse and plain for the same reason, as nothing has a stronger influence on vanity than dress. (140-1, emphasis added)

Scott's efforts at maintaining the status quo of the class structure of her day indicate that her dream of eliminating luxury through establishing a utopian society is unrealizable. As Engels observes in "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," the utopians are 'foredoomed' to failure because their social models are based merely on an optimism of the will rather than a 'scientific' assessment of the historical balance of class forces; the role of class antagonisms and class militancy in the transition to socialism is ignored.⁴⁴ Although Scott depicts a picture of communalist society that anticipates the ideal society Marx has in mind later, her proposed means of realizing the natural harmony of human needs through the peaceful suppression of class conflicts in Millenium Hall make her dream an "inauthentic future," to use Bloch's terminology.

It is interesting to note that, although Scott condemns luxury, she is different from her contemporary male writers with regard to women's susceptibility to luxury. As I pointed out in my Introduction, eighteenth-century male

⁴⁴ Frederick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," K. Marx and F. Engels: Selected Works (1892; New York, 1968) 401.

writers, such as Swift and Pope, tend to regard some women as symbols of luxury. Marcuse observes in Eros and Civilization that, culturally speaking, the female principle represents sexuality and pleasure and appears as a curse, which is both disruptive and destructive. Because of their economic unproductivity, women are useless drones: a luxury item in a poor man's budget.⁴⁵ In Millenium Hall women are not presented as absolutely immune to luxury and corruption. In fact, female luxury is portrayed as responsible for the instability of marriage and domestic disharmony, as in the story of Miss Mancel and Mrs. Morgan. Sir Charles is in debt because of his wife's extravagance; the luxury of Mrs. Alworth brings unhappiness to her marriage. But Scott also points out that women, if properly educated, could be transformed from symbols of excessive consumption into custodians of financial economy through whose efforts a luxury-free society is possible.

From the very beginning of Millenium Hall the narrator ("converted male") voices the Lockean tabula rasa theory which negates the above-mentioned assumption that women are born evil:

Your constant endeavours have been to
inculcate the best principles into youthful
minds, the only probable means of mending

⁴⁵ Marcuse 161.

mankind; for the foundations of most of our virtues, or our vices, are laid in that season of life when we are most susceptible of impression, and when on our minds, as on a sheet of white paper, any characters may be engraven. . . .(1-2)

At various points of the book the male narrator expresses his admiration for the female inhabitants in Millenium Hall, and at the end of the book is determined to follow their examples, though on a smaller scale. Also, the male narrator's companion, the libertine Lamont, is slowly converted to a religious man by observing the good examples of the ladies in Millennium Hall, a clear indication that men should be educated morally by women.

This gender-role-reversal had strong echoes in later feminist utopian novels. For example, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland (1915) the female Utopia is visited by three male American explorers. Two male chauvinists are ordered to leave Herland; only the third, Jeff, is permitted to stay because he has acknowledged the superiority of women's culture and has chosen to serve women. Women, in the words of one of the mentor-figures in Millenium Hall, Mrs. Mancel, should be the enforcers of divine laws, if not the legislators.

"We do not set up for reformers," said Mrs.

Mancel, "we wish to regulate ourselves by the

laws laid down to us, and as far as our influence can extend, endeavour to enforce them; beyond that small circle all is foreign to us; we have sufficient employment in improving ourselves; to mend the world requires much abler hands." (148)

But it is quite obvious that in this low-key Amazonian declaration no fundamental changes of the society are envisaged or proposed; the ladies are merely content to "regulate themselves" by the laws laid down to them by a patriarchal ideology within a "small circle" designated by patriarchal society. So this vision of women as educators within a patriarchal social structure is just what Bloch described as the "Hope Principle", a hope placed in an "inauthentic future".

Nevertheless, this view of Scott's is interesting in a historical context. Rousseau, Scott's 'fellow-utopian writer' in France, explicitly indicates that his luxury-free Utopia is a patriarchal one. Clarence, the perfect utopian model in La Nouvelle Héloïse, is dominated by Wolmar, who is described as "le judicieux père de famille."⁴⁶ Obviously,

⁴⁶ In Le Contract Social the importance of patriarchy is reiterated:

La plus ancienne de toutes les sociétés et la seule naturelle est celle de la famille. . . . La famille est donc si l'on veut le premier modèle des sociétés politiques; le chef est l'image du père, le peuple est l'image des enfants, et tous étant nes égaux et libres n'alienent leur liberté que pour leur utilité.

Scott does not agree with Rousseau's notion that man should be the leader of Utopia. Scott's idea that women should be responsible for the society's moral reform finds echo in quite a number of utopian-socialists-feminists a century later. Barbara Taylor's Eve and the New Jerusalem records the doctrines of Saint-Simonians and the Owenites and the belief in a female Messiah in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁷ It should be noted that the first self-proclaimed female Redeemer in England, Ann Lee from Manchester,⁴⁸ declared herself a female Messiah in 1770, eight years after the publication of Millenium Hall. In spite of the fact that Ann Lee might not have read Millenium Hall, the historical proximity is too striking to be merely coincidental. So in spite of its conservatism, its inability to break away totally from the role and sphere designated to women by patriarchal ideology, Millenium Hall has much in common with the later female Messianism/feminism. Perhaps this connection proves what Lucien Goldmann asserts in Le Dieu Caché, that texts are not creations of individual geniuses but are based upon 'trans-

⁴⁷ Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983)

⁴⁸ Taylor 161.

individual mental structures' belonging to particular social groups.⁴⁹

3. Sarah Scott's idea of female education as an effective remedy for luxury and corruption

Scott sees female education as a moral responsibility. The general educational principles in *Millennium Hall* are puritanical in essence--frugality, industry, independence and mental improvement. Obviously, these educational principles are different from those propounded by eighteenth-century men, especially male writers of the leisure class.⁵⁰ Since the aim of female education is supposedly to train suitable wives, especially for an upwardly mobile marriage--if at all possible--the educational subjects are usually limited to fashion, music

⁴⁹ Lucien Goldmann, Le Dieu Caché (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964)

⁵⁰ According to one anonymous eighteenth-century male writer, women are expected to be educated as an object of man's luxury:

We educate women from infancy to marriage, in such a way as to debilitate both their corporeal and their mental powers. All the accomplishments we teach them are directed, not to their future benefit in life, but to the amusement of the male sex; and having for a series of years, with much assiduity, and sometimes at much expense, incapacitated them for any serious occupations, we say they are not fit to govern themselves.

(quoted by Linda K. Kerber in Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, 208.)

and needlework. Such an education considerably incapacitates women, both physically and mentally. Veblen in The Theory of the Leisure Class points out that the fragile image of women is in fact a result of conspicuous waste:

Apart from this general control exercised by the norm of conspicuous waste over the ideal of feminine beauty, there are one or two details which merit specific mention . . . the ideal requires delicate and diminutive hands and feet and a slender waist. These features, together with the other, related faults of structure that commonly go with them, go to show that the person so affected is incapable of useful effort and must therefore be supported in idleness by her owner. She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength. . . the constricted waist. . . has had so wide and persistent a vogue in the communities of the Western culture, and so also the deformed foot of the Chinese. Both of these are mutilations of unquestioned repulsiveness to the untrained sense. They are items of pecuniary and cultural beauty which have come to do duty as elements of the

ideal of womanliness.⁵¹

The inhabitants in Millenium Hall bear no resemblance to these male-created female images. Instead of beauty, charm and feebleness, which are the essential qualities that make women men's object of luxury, Scott's women demonstrate marvellous self-reliance, economic independence, industry, intelligence and competence. In Millenium Hall all the ladies are described as intelligent, benevolent, and virtuous rather than physically attractive; it is mental improvement that they aim at. All the fashionable activities such as cards, parties, plays and masquerades are despised in Millenium Hall because they are meaningless compared to intellectual pursuit. Contrary to the giddy and frivolous female image created by Swift and Pope, Scott's females in Millenium Hall are all capable of independent thinking and good judgment, as the narrator comments: "their conversation . . . plainly evinced with how much greater strength the mind can exert itself in a regular and rational way of life, than in a course of dissipation"(13). This advocacy for independent thinking is, in fact, very modern even viewed in a twentieth-century perspective. Michel Foucault has argued that the rise of parliamentary institutions and of new conceptions of political liberty was accompanied by a darker counter-

⁵¹ Veblen 148-9.

movement, by the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body.⁵² Feminists argue that since the aesthetic of femininity in a patriarchal society mandates fragility and a lack of muscular strength (so that female bodies can offer little resistance to physical abuse by men), regulated by the patriarchal power, women's minds are controlled in such a way that their "docile bodies" become "self-policing subjects," which are manifested in women's images about themselves (to be as unaggressive as possible, to be as fragile/slim as possible). In a word, women lose the capability of thinking independently and model themselves according to the patriarchal concept of femininity.⁵³ Viewed in this twentieth-century perspective, Scott's principles for female education are highly subversive of the cultural indoctrination that operates as a part of patriarchal ideology.

Apart from intellectual and moral pursuit, it is also the aim of education in Millenium Hall to teach useful, practical labour skills so that women can earn their own

⁵² Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 138.

⁵³ Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, eds. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988) 61-86.

subsistence and do not have to rely on marriage to establish their material support. Consequently, they would not have to be victims of male luxury. The labor skills include writing, book-keeping, needle-work, spinning, knitting, dairy and poultry-managing. Scott takes care to point out that this kind of female education is totally different from the 'genteel' education, which does not teach women any useful skills to gain financial independence:

These ladies (the inhabitants in Millenium Hall) long beheld with compassion the wretched fate of those women, who, from scantiness of fortune, and pride of family, are reduced to become dependant. . . . educated as is called, genteelly, or in other words idly, they are ignorant of every thing that might give them superior abilities to the lower rank of people. (80-1)

The ladies in Millenium Hall not only teach young girls working skills but also provide them with the necessary means of production. When a girl of the lower rank is getting married, Mrs. Mancel stocks her with dairy produce and furnishes her with poultry so that she can contribute to the provision for her family (144). Such measures enable women to contribute to the domestic economy, and consequently the image of women as consumer changes into that of productive labourer.

Like most of the moral educators in the eighteenth century, Scott lays considerable emphasis on industry, that standard moral value of the middle class. Industry is described as the most effective means of eliminating material luxury, corruption and vice. In Millenium Hall all the inhabitants are early risers, and they are employed in different kinds of activities all day long because it is the creed in Millenium Hall that

industry . . . [is] necessary to all
stations, as the basis of almost every
virtue. An idle mind, like fallow ground, is
the soil for every weed to grow in; in it
vice strengthens, the seed of every vanity
flourishes unmolested and luxuriant;
 discontent, malignity, ill humour, spread far
 and wide, and the mind becomes a chaos, which
 is beyond human power to call into order and
 beauty. (84, emphasis added)

Scott's educational system makes industry and physical labor a part of the well-being of humankind.⁵⁴ In Millenium Hall no mandatory labour is imposed on the inhabitants, but everybody enjoys participating in productive labor. Consequently, the world is transformed into one of peace and

⁵⁴ Hogarth's engravings "Industry and Idleness" depict the alienating nature of labour in the eighteenth century as well as the benefits of being industrious.

harmony. Other utopian writers also fantasized about this issue. Fourier, for example, believes that it is possible to transform labor into pleasure, or into "luxury" (in the sense of libidinal pleasure). Yet this transformation requires a complete change in the social institutions such as the distribution of the product according to need, the assignment of functions according to individual faculties and inclinations, the constant mutation of functions, short work periods, and so on: ". . . l'industrie est la destination qui nous est assignée par le créateur, comment penser qu'il veuille nous y amener par la violence, et qu'il n'ait pas su mettre en jeu quelque ressort plus noble, quelque amorce capable de transformer les travaux en plaisirs."⁵⁵ Karl Marx also pointed out that the capitalist mode of production created alienated social relations since the end of production--money--is the self-alienated form of labor and the true meaning of human activity is lost, whereas in the socialist system labor is a personal free activity. Since Scott does not propose any change in social institutions, her ideas on industry--labor--luxury are still very much a "hope in [an] inauthentic future."

⁵⁵ (If) "industry is the fate assigned to us by the Creator, how can one believe that he wishes to force us into it--that he does not know how to bring to bear some nobler means, some enticement capable of transforming work into pleasure." F. Armand and R. Maublanc, Fourier: Textes Choisis (Paris: Editions Sociales Internationales, 1937) 3: 154.

Scott's aim of female education--to train women to become competent workers both physically and intellectually so that they would no longer be symbols of conspicuous consumption and fall victim to men's luxury--is different from that of Rousseau, who also sets up luxury-free utopian models in La Nouvelle Héloïse. Also, in Emile Rousseau asserts that women should be "weak and passive"; "the proper business of the woman is to bear children"; "woman is specially made for man's delight"; "there are no colleges for girls, so much the better for them"; "a woman's education must be planned in relation to man"; "a woman should always be in subjection to a man . . . and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his."⁵⁶ Although Rousseau proposes a radical change in the traditional education of men, he never casts a doubt on the traditional education of women and is happy to leave women to the role of child-bearer, house-keeper and nurse.⁵⁷ Nor is Scott's aim of female education similar to that proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft, who also lays emphasis on the development of the female mind, but who is nevertheless concerned with the

⁵⁶ Rousseau 4: 247-343.

⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Helen Evans Misenheimer: Rousseau on the Education of Women (Washington: University Press of America, 1981)

importance of a woman's role at home.⁵⁸ By emphasizing self-reliance and economic independence for women, though the means of realizing this is still nebulous, Millenium Hall provides a tentative answer to the issue raised in Defoe's Moll Flanders (that is, what a woman is supposed to do if she wants to maintain her financial independence and keep her moral integrity). In general, Millenium Hall transcends its age's gender-discriminatory idea of female education as represented by Rousseau.

Lastly, the treatment of sexual relationships is also an important component in Scott's idea of female education. According to John Sekora, the concept of luxury has always been associated with lust:

The major writers of the English Renaissance for the most part retain the medieval emphasis upon lust in their use of the term. Spencer writes of "lustfull luxurie and thriftless waste," Marlowe of "unchaste

⁵⁸ In both 'Thoughts on the Education of Daughters' and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman Mary Wollstonecraft asserts that the goal of female education is 'to prepare a woman to fulfill the duties of a wife and mother.' She does say, however, that women have a role in society--that of citizen, but a woman's education should chiefly enable her to be her husband's companion and an adequate mother for the rearing of her children. For a detailed discussion, see Chapter III.

luxury."⁵⁹

He also observes that in the churches of Toulouse, Moissac, and Braisne, Luxuria is a nude figure being attacked at the breasts and genitals by snakes or toads.⁶⁰ Also, Montesquieu in The Spirit of the Laws points out that luxury does not mean only wealth and expensive consumption but sexual self-indulgence as well. To banish luxury was to banish sexual vice.

In the history of utopian literature the treatment of the relationship between sexuality and the ideal social model is diverse but it deserves our attention. The Saint-Simonians are notorious for their freedom in sexual activity.⁶¹ Fourier is the one who justifies "free love" theoretically. He believes that an ideal society should be based on the "love group." His basic thesis is that there exists a dialectic of bourgeois interpersonal relations: in the first instance, people were cut off from one another and were incapable of communicating on any level; if they did overcome their coldness, the negation of the first moment would be lust. Lust also had to be negated, but this could only be accomplished after experiencing lust. Only when

⁵⁹ Sekora 46.

⁶⁰ Sekora 44.

⁶¹ Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel eds, French Utopias (New York: The Free Press, 1966) 12.

lust was transcended could relationships be based on true, spontaneous affinities. Only then the fragmentation and incoherence of alienated individuals in the capitalist mode of production would be overcome and society would become healthy.⁶² Scott's Millenium Hall is on the whole a desexed society--all the male inhabitants there are either senile or deformed to some degree; all the female inhabitants are either single or widowed, and they all prefer celibacy to married life. Because the matrimonial/sexual relationship is bound up with economic and political structures, Scott's women do not risk their independence in the money-and-lust dominated marriage-market. Miss Selwyn voices this preference: "I would not change my present happy situation for the uncertainties of wedlock" (211). It is worth noting that in Millenium Hall sexuality has been deliberately downplayed, as nothing can be compared to the importance of moral and intellectual pursuits of women. Romance is consequently excluded from this female domain:

All that romance ever represented in the plains of Arcadia, are much inferior to the charms of Millenium Hall, except the want of shepherds be judged a deficiency, that

⁶² Charles Fourier, Oeuvres Complète de Charles Fourier (Paris: Librairie societaire, 1843-6) II. For a detailed account of Fourier's vision of group love, see Mark Poster, "Fourier's Concept of the Group," Minnesota Review 6 (1976): 76-87.

nothing else can compensate; there indeed
 they fall short of what romantic writers
 represent, and have formed a female Arcadia.
 (226)

To a twentieth-century reader, this stance towards
 lust(luxury)/sexuality sounds somewhat Foucauldian.
 Foucault argues that sexuality is a domain saturated with
 power, produced through the complex interaction of multiple
 discursive and institutional practices. To designate
 sexuality as the locus of human freedom is in fact to
 acknowledge its power. Hence Foucault's suggestion is to
 desexualize sexuality by multiplying and diffusing
 pleasures.⁶³ (It is noteworthy that Lillian Faderman's book
Surpassing the Love of Man,⁶⁴ in which the activities of
 Sarah Scott and Lady Bab are recorded, has been applauded by
 Foucault as an instance of critical desexualization.⁶⁵)
 However, Scott's strategy of desexualizing sexuality by
 excluding men and replacing the romance/heterosexual
 relationship with other "worthier pursuits" is, in the terms

⁶³ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol.1
 trans. Robert Hurttley (New York: Pantheon, 1978) passim.

⁶⁴ Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men:
 Romantic Friendship and Love between Women, from the
 Renaissance to the Present (New York: Morrow, 1981)

⁶⁵ Winifred Woodhull, "Sexuality, Power, and the
 Question of Rape," Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on
 Resistance 169.

of Jameson, only a "disguised fantasy," because she never explains how women shall effectively exclude the male species.⁶⁶ Historically speaking, Scott's rigorous attitude towards sexual relationships in female education is a prologue to the later female Messianism. The female Messianists regarded themselves as the saviours of mankind and as far too superior to be the object of man's lechery.⁶⁷ As I mentioned above, there was Ann Lee, a working-class Manchester woman, who proclaimed herself the female redeemer (1770). She was succeeded by a Welshwoman Mary Evans, who declared herself the 'bride of Christ' (1780), then a Scotswoman Luckie Buchan, who declared herself as Christ's younger sister (1790); later came Sarah Flaxmer, also a self-proclaimed female Saviour (mid-1790s).⁶⁸

The luxury-proof Amazonian Utopia depicted by Scott is, as I discussed above, highly ambivalent in terms of its social formation, economic structure, ideological system and its cultural identities. It is only a "figure of Hope" in the "inauthentic future" (Bloch's terms). However, Scott's

⁶⁶ Jameson, "Introduction/Prospectus: To Reconsider the Relationship of Marxism to Utopian Thought" 57.

⁶⁷ Ann Lee (Mother Ann) wrote, "No soul could follow Christ . . . while living in . . . the gratifications of lust." See Taylor 166. However, Taylor does mention that some female Messianists advocated sexual heterodoxy, as in the case of Joanna Southcott (1750-1814).

⁶⁸ Taylor 161-2.

vision of women as educators responsible for society's moral as well as economic reform is quite avant-garde for her time. Naïve and impracticable as her theory is, she nevertheless anticipates the nineteenth-century utopian socialists from whose basis springs the Marxist theory of communism, though the latter asserts a radically different means of realization. She also inspires, directly or indirectly, the later theory of female Messianism, whose impact can still be felt in the feminist movement of the twentieth century.

Chapter II The Interrogative Text: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Views on Luxury

Although Sarah Scott and Lady Barbara Montagu established a "feminist Utopia" during their lifetimes, they remained, to a certain degree, recluses. Unlike Sarah Scott, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a figure who attracted much public attention in her time: she was a great traveller, who faithfully recorded the customs and life in foreign countries; a "feminist" who was concerned with the issues of women's education and marriage; a social commentator who voiced her opinions on contemporary politics and social problems; a literary critic who was actively engaged in the political paper battles between Walpole and Bolingbroke and, the first person to introduce the inoculation of smallpox to England. One of her contemporaries, Sir James Caldwell, mentioned her as "one of the greatest geniuses of her time."¹

Since the various roles that Lady Mary played have already been thoroughly examined by her numerous biographers, it is not my intention to repeat their examinations here. The present chapter aims to explore Lady Mary's views on luxury and its interrogativeness. It must

¹ Robert Halsband, The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 282.

be noted that here I am treating Lady Mary's oeuvre as a text, similar to Bakhtin's treatment of Dostoevsky. Therefore, I am applying the concept of "interrogativeness" to Lady Mary's oeuvre, not to any one text.

Lady Mary's letters and essays on luxury are interrogative and open-ended. The autonomy of the voices inside the text denies us a simplistic reading of her works as the productions of a Walpolean hack and invites us to ponder on the questions the text poses. As a matter of fact, the interrogativeness of the literary text is always an issue that interests critics. Catherine Belsey points out: "the interrogative text refuses a single point of view, but brings points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction."² Bakhtin makes a similar observation in his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. He says about Dostoevsky's use of the multiplicity of equal voices in a text:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of

² Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London and New York: Methuen, 1980) 92.

consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.³

Louis Althusser, a French Marxist critic, also asserts that the text has its autonomy as well; and within the text there is an interrogativeness, or "an internal distance" from the ideology in which it is held, which permits the reader to construct from within the text a critique of this ideology. In "A Letter on Art: in Reply to André Daspre" Althusser makes the following observation:

What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing,' 'perceiving' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of knowing), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes. Macherey has shown this very clearly in the case of Tolstoy, by extending Lenin's analyses. Balzac and Solzhenitsyn give us a 'view' of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a retreat, and internal distantiation from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us 'perceive'

³ Mikhail Bakhtin: Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 6.

(but not know) in some sense from the inside, by an internal distance, the very ideology in which they are held.⁴

My discussion in this chapter chiefly focuses on the following aspects of Lady Mary's "interrogative" views on luxury: 1. The Walpolean economic policy and Lady Mary's views on conspicuous consumption 2. Lady Mary's views on retirement and foreign luxury 3. Lady Mary's views on class hierarchy and political virtues as related to luxury 4. Lady Mary's views on education as a means of combating luxury.

1. The Walpolean economic policy and Lady Mary's views on conspicuous consumption

Because Lady Mary's views on luxury are so much related to the political climate of her time, it would be relevant to give a brief sketch of the luxury debate of that period. Lady Mary was born in 1689 and died in 1762. The latter part of her life was lived in the turmoil of the conflict between Sir Robert Walpole's ministry and the Opposition party headed by Henry St. John, Viscount of Bolingbroke. According to John Sekora, during the later 1720s and the 1730s the terms of debate over luxury were widened with the superaddition of Tory theories of history

⁴ Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB 1971) 204.

and politics to the older criticisms of luxury. Luxury became a weapon in the serious paper battles against Walpole and his supporters, and a banner of attack for the opposition.⁵

Sir Robert Walpole's ministry comes within the so-called period of economic revolution (1688-1740) in England. The Bank of England had developed, and the stock-market grew into a thriving institution after the South Sea Bubble of 1720. Walpole was the political patron of financial capitalism because it served his major interest--power. In 1730 one issue of Walpole's London Journal offered a lengthy defence and praise of the new and mysterious world of financial capitalism.⁶ But meanwhile England's excessive importation of silk and foreign luxuries also brought harm to her domestic industry. To protect these domestic industries, heavy taxes were levied on imported luxury goods such as tea, coffee, cocoa, chocolate, wines, tobacco, linen and French silk.⁷

⁵ John Sekora, Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollet (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) 78.

⁶ Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968) 39-55.

⁷ H. T. Dickinson, Walpole and the Whig Supremacy (London: The English Universities Press Ltd, 1973) 93-112. Also, see J. R. McCulloch, England's Interest and Improvement, Consisting in the Increase of the Store and Trade of this Kingdom, in Early English Tracts on Commerce

Yet, the discouraging of the importation of foreign luxuries does not mean that Walpole was altogether against conspicuous consumption. On the contrary, he accepted the central thesis of Bernard Mandeville's Fable of the Bees and called luxury both useful and necessary to defend the new economic order and to promote commerce.⁸ One of Walpole's ministerial papers, The Daily Gazetteer, rejected the Opposition's demand for governmental action to end luxury and corruption by asserting that such action was outside the legitimate sphere of the magistrate's power.

Bolingbroke and the Opposition party were strongly opposed to the financial revolution in England because it threatened the gentry and the traditional order. They accused Walpole of protecting the interests of the rich at the cost of higher taxation on the majority of the population. Walpole was also accused of bribing men to support him with their votes in elections in Parliament and of spending lavishly to protect the interests of Hanoverians. Bolingbroke asserted that under Walpole's ministry corruption and luxury had been spread everywhere, and that luxury played a causative role in the nation's moral decline. In his article On Luxury (1726) Bolingbroke argues:

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952) 232.

⁸ As mentioned in Sekora 88.

A Discourse on Operas, and the gayer pleasures of the town, may seem to be too trifling for the important scheme of affairs, in which we are at present engaged; but I must own my fears, that they will bear too great a part in the success of a war, to make the consideration of them foreign to it. A very little reflection on history will suggest this observation, that every nation has made either a great or inconsiderable figure in the world, as it has fallen into luxury or resisted its temptations.

. . . When the mind is enervated by luxury, the body soon falls an easy victim to it; for how is it possible to imagine, that a man can be capable of the great and generous sentiments, which virtue inspires, whose mind is filled with the soft ideas, and wanton delicacies that pleasure must infuse?⁹

In such a battle of economic theories and arguments over the issue of luxury, Lady Mary's stance was a complex one. Her problematic texts openly invite us to cast doubt on the

⁹ Lord Bolingbroke, The Works of Lord Bolingbroke (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1844) 1: 474.

validity of single-minded claims many critics such as Robert Halsband,¹⁰ Bertrand A. Goldgar¹¹ and others have made on her political allegiance.

Needless to say, Lady Mary's stance in fighting against foreign imported luxuries seems to be an act in support of Walpole's economic policy. In No. 1 of The Nonsense of Common Sense she asserts that she is "a friend ever to every tax that is or can be laid on superfluities."¹² As we know, Walpole's excise scheme raised tax on tobacco and wines; Lady Mary's declaration certainly could be regarded as an instance of her support for Walpole's scheme. In the same essay she also strongly suggests that upper-class ladies should wear domestic stuff and resist foreign imported silk:

. . . the woollen manufacture, the staple commodity of these kingdoms, the natural growth of our own lands, and the support of the poor, [were] reduced now to a very low ebb, by the luxury and ill taste of the rich, and the fantastic mimicry

¹⁰ Robert Halsband's contention that Lady Mary was a ministerial hack can be found in almost all of his works on Lady Mary.

¹¹ Bertrand A. Goldgar, Walpole and the Wits (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976) 158.

¹² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, The Nonsense of Common Sense ed. Robert Halsband (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1947) 3.

of our ladies who are so accustomed to shiver in silks, that they exclaim at the hardships of warmth and decency . . . I would have them appear in a habit that does honor to their own country, and would be an universal benefit to the nation--The Gentry would feel it in the payment of their rents, and the tenants in the sale of their wool.¹³

This statement of Lady Mary, to advise women to resist foreign luxury and promote the domestic woollen business, is in itself nothing startlingly novel: it is a strong cultural motif in her period which connects female consumption with mercantile capitalism.¹⁴ In fact, in 1729, Swift made a similar observation about how to rescue the Irish economy by setting restrictions on female consumption--resisting the imports of vanity commodities:

It is to gratify the vanity and pride, and luxury of the women . . . that we owe this unsupportable grievance of bringing in the instruments of our ruin. There is annually brought over to this kingdom near ninety thousand pounds worth of silk,

¹³ The Nonsense of Common Sense 2-3.

¹⁴ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 34-99.

whereof the greater part is manufactured: Thirty thousand pounds more is expended in muslin, holland, cambric, and callico . . . If the ladies, till better times, will not be content to go in their own country shifts, I wish they may go in rags. Let them vie with each other in the fineness of their native linen: Their beauty and gentleness will as well appear, as if they were covered over with diamonds and brocade.¹⁵

The English nobility in Lady Mary's time also had a strong penchant for imported operas. Farinelli, an Italian singer of great fame, was paid highly for singing with the Opera of the Nobility. In No. 3 of The Nonsense of Common Sense Lady Mary maintains her stance as a critic of conspicuous consumption in imported luxuries by making a facetious proposal of erecting a mechanical statue of Farinelli, to save the English nation a vast sum of money and also to avoid a war with Spain (because Farinelli set out for Spain on 11 June 1737). She ironically points out that large amounts of money have been spent in satisfying the English upper-class's penchant for foreign imported arts

¹⁵ Jonathan Swift, "A Proposal that All the Ladies and Women of Ireland should appear constantly in Irish Manufactures," Prose Works, ed. H. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951) 12: 126-7.

and culture.¹⁶

On the surface, Lady Mary's opinion on the issue of foreign luxury and the national economy is the opposite to what Mandeville asserts in The Fable of the Bees. For Mandeville,

Humility, content, meekness, obedience to reasonable husbands, frugality and all the virtues together, if they were possess'd of them [the virtues] in the most eminent degree, could not possibly be a thousandth part so serviceable, to make an opulent, powerful, and what we call a flourishing kingdom, than their most hateful qualities--the consumption of superfluities.¹⁷

Yet, is Lady Mary truly anti-Mandevillian in her theories about luxury? Interestingly, when it comes to the issue of luxuries which are not foreign, her argument sounds amazingly Mandevillian. Mandeville was very clear about the relativity of luxury. He argues that, as society prospers, standards will alter: what is regarded as immediately

¹⁶ The Nonsense of Common Sense 13.

This attack on foreign luxuries on Lady Mary's part could be regarded as a modified version of James Erskine's vigorous denunciation of foreign singers in Parliament on 5 March, 1735 which was recorded by Halsband in his annotation to The Nonsense of Common Sense 51.

¹⁷ Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits ed. F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924) 1: 225-8.

necessary for subsistence in one society was often previously considered to be luxurious. So violent may be the change, that objects of luxury from earlier times will be regarded as the lowest offerings of public charity at a later date. He uses the production of crimson cloth as an example to ask people to imagine to what height of luxury a nation must have arrived when a product of such high quality is considered the right even of an ordinary serving soldier.¹⁸ Lady Mary makes a similar observation on the relativity of "superfluities" and "necessaries." In a letter to Philippa Mundi on 10 Jan. 1713 she points out:

. . . 'tis easy to be without superfluities, 'tis impossible to be without necessities, and as the world is made (and I see no prospect of its being reformed) there are some superfluities become necessities. You can be without six horses, you can't be without a coach; you can be without laced liveries, you can't be without footmen.¹⁹

In No. 3 of The Nonsense of Common Sense she even paraphrases the Mandevillian theory "Private Vice, Public Benefit" by saying "for the highest perfection of politics, they say, is, to make the vices of the people contribute to

¹⁸ Mandeville 1: 358.

¹⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ed. Robert Halsband (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 1: 178.

the welfare of the state."²⁰ One might pause and reflect on the possible irony of "they say" here. Yet, the evidence in her other remarks suggests that we cannot exclude the possibility of her approval of the Mandevillian theory.

Luxury generates trade and exchange. Trade in turn generates money. As J. A. Pocock points out, in Augustan England, money (especially paper money as opposed to landed property) as the medium of exchange was always a focus of conflict between the landed class and those in trade.²¹ The luxury debate involves debate on the moral value of money. Lady Mary's attitudes towards money are "polyphonal" too. In her numerous letters to Edward Wortley Montagu before and after their marriage, she voices her contempt for money: "Money is very little to me, because all beyond necessities I do not value, that is to be purchased by it."²² We can assume that it is mobile property she is referring to since the word "purchase" suggests circulating. Elsewhere she expresses her concern for the moral degeneration of her age, presumably brought on by the circulation of paper money. In a letter to Phillipa Mundy on 17 April 1714, Lady Mary

²⁰ The Nonsense of Common Sense 13.

²¹ J. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 423-61.

²² Letters 1: 153.

points out that Mammonism was prevalent in their society: "Money can gild every thing, and perhaps that way of thinking is not quite ridiculous, except the world could be alter'd from what it is."²³ The same idea appears many years later in her letter to James Stuart Mackenzie on 28 Feb. 1761: "In this corrupt age you know money does everything."²⁴

Yet, Lady Mary did not hesitate to tell Montagu that a certain amount of money is necessary to life and that she herself is not to be suffered to endure any straits of fortune.²⁵ In her later years she also advised her granddaughter that riches were not to be despised (paper money is presumably included in her definition of "riches"). In a letter to Lady Bute on 19 Feb, 1750 she points out that young girls should not have a contempt for riches; instead they should look on these things as blessings where they are bestowed.²⁶ Obviously there is not a single point of view in Lady Mary's opinions on riches; two points of views are brought into unresolved collision. One can argue that the younger Lady Mary was more idealistic whereas the older Lady

²³ Letters 1: 205.

²⁴ Letters 3: 256.

²⁵ Letters 1: 157.

²⁶ Letters 2: 452.

Mary tended to be more "worldly-minded" with regard to money. But I feel her ambiguous, or even contradictory attitude can be better explained if we put it in the context of the collision between the agrarian values of a self-sufficient economy of the gentry, of which Lady Mary was a member, and the commercial values of money represented by the Whigs whom she supported. These poles make Lady Mary's attitude towards money as a medium of exchange an ambiguous one.

2. Lady Mary's views on retirement and foreign luxury

As I have discussed in my chapter on A Description of Millenium Hall, the attack on luxury by eighteenth-century women is almost invariably related to the advocacy of retirement from the outer corrupt world and the contempt for material luxury. Retirement is a constant theme in Lady Mary's letters. But as Harriet Guest points out, there is a double meaning in Lady Mary's discussion of retirement.²⁷ On one hand, she regards retirement as an effective way to resist luxury. Before and after her marriage with Montagu, Lady Mary emphasizes that retirement is the ideal way of life for her in their correspondence. On 16 Feb. 1711 in her letter to Montagu she declares herself to be above "the

²⁷ Harriet Guest, "A Double Lustre: Femininity and Sociable Commerce 1730-60," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1990): 484-7.

unsatisfactory pleasures of the town," saying "A low manner of living has been my entire inclination ever since I can remember having an inclination." Less than a month later she assures him: "I could be content to pass my life in the country. A private manner of living suits my inclination."²⁸ While discussing the frivolities of London upper-class society in her letter to Philippa Mundy on 6 Feb. 1712, Lady Mary voices, in a patronizing tone, her contempt for those who prefer urban luxuries to retired happiness.²⁹ Like Matthew Bramble in Smollett's Humphry Clinker, she finds London disgusting with its luxury and corruption. Lady Mary's inclination for rural retirement was quite consistent during her lifetime. In a letter on 24 Feb. 1738 to Francesco Algarotti, her Italian lover, she compares the urban features of London to an unhealthy infection: "at present we have a complication of everything in London that is contrary to my inclination: noise, crowd, division, and almost an impossibility of keeping entirely clear of the infection."³⁰ Later, Lady Mary told her daughter that her true vocation lay in a monastery. While discussing Richardson's Clarissa, she reveals the intention

²⁸ Letters 1: 80, 88.

²⁹ Letters 1: 115-6.

³⁰ Letters 2: 114-5.

of entering an English monastery in her youth.³¹ In an earlier letter to Lady Bute she praises the convent in Italy, saying that it is the most agreeable community she has seen.³² Lady Mary was obsessed with the idea that her granddaughter might lead a nun-like single life; while discussing her granddaughter's education in her letter of 15 April 1755, she confesses that she "looks on her granddaughters as lay nuns."³³

This stance was actually not novel at Lady Mary's time when the bourgeois became increasingly concerned about feminine visibility. Of all Lady Mary's female contemporaries, it was Mary Astell the moralist and feminist who had the greatest influence on the formation of her thought. According to Louisa Stuart, Lady Mary's granddaughter, Lady Mary was never free from the spiritual influence of Mary Astell. The latter's pamphlet A Serious Proposal (1694-7), which suggests the establishment of a Protestant nunnery to provide a haven from the corruption of the world for females, obviously had great impact on Lady Mary. Also, another educator, John Brown, in his Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (1757) condemns

³¹ Letters 3: 27, 97.

³² Letters 2: 420.

³³ Letters 3: 83.

lack of gender difference as a manifestation of commercialized corruption:

The Sexes have now little other apparent Distinction, beyond that of person and dress: Their peculiar and characteristic manners are confounded and lost: The one sex having advanced into Boldness, as the other have sunk into Effeminacy.³⁴

So, Lady Mary's views on female retirement concurred with that of her contemporaries.

Yet, on the other hand, one cannot simply say that Lady Mary regards retirement as a way of combating luxury. On the contrary, visible female industriousness, as opposed to idle aristocratic retirement, meets with approbation in The Nonsense of Common Sense, in which she argues that if the daughters of the shopkeepers get themselves involved in honest trades, they might contribute to the wealth of their country.³⁵ What adds interest to this paradox is Lady Mary's poem written in justification of female visibility: "An Answer to a Lady Advising me to Retirement" (1730):

You little know the Heart that you advise,

³⁴ John Brown, Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (London: Davis, 1757) 44-5.

³⁵ The Nonsense of Common Sense 5.

I view this various Scene with equal Eyes,
 In crouded Court I find myselfe alone,
 And pay my Worship to a nobler Throne.

Long since the value of this World I know,
 Pity the Madness, and despise the Show,
 Well as I can, my tedious part I bear
 And wait Dismission without painful Fear.

Seldom I mark Mankind's detested ways
 Not hearing Censure, nor Affecting Praise,
 And unconcerned my Future Fate I trust;
 To that sole Being, Merciful and Just.³⁶

So retirement is, paradoxically, a virtue embodying female propriety as opposed to the aristocratic display of luxury and, at the same time, a negative value which is against bourgeois virtues such as industry and honest productive activity; to indulge oneself in non-productive retirement is to indulge oneself in idle luxury.

How are we to view this paradox? Raymond Williams's theory of "residual and emergent culture" seems to me

³⁶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy eds. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 258. Harriet Guest also uses this poem to illustrate Lady Mary's defence of courtly life in her article A Double Lustre: Femininity and Sociable Commerce, 1730-60.

specifically appropriate on the coexistence of these seemingly paradoxical views of Lady Mary's. According to Williams, there is a temporal relation between a dominant culture that lies between a residual culture and an emergent culture.³⁷ That is to say, no culture can be regarded as an isolated phenomenon. We should always view a culture in the context of its past and its future. For example, in bourgeois culture we can find the residue of feudal culture and the presage of socialist culture. The ambivalence in Lady Mary's views towards retirement illustrates both the incorporation and non-incorporation of the emergent bourgeois values of industry and female domesticity with the residual aristocratic value of display and idleness. When these values do not mesh, they clash, as Lady Mary's ideas do.

Lady Mary's attitudes to luxury in non-British cultures interestingly illustrate the fact that different discourses compete for hegemony within a single text; or, as Althusser says, the different autonomous voices deny monolithic interpretation. It is obvious that Lady Mary concurs with Fénelon's (the archbishop of Cambrai) idea of luxury when she comments on the lifestyle in Nuremberg in

³⁷ Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1980) 41.

her letter to Lady Bristol on 22 Aug. 1716:³⁸

They have sumptuary laws in this town which distinguish their rank by their dress and prevent that excess which ruins so many other cities and has a more agreeable effect to the eye of a stranger than our fashions. I think after the Archbishop of Cambrai having declared for them, I need not be ashamed to own that I wish these laws were in force in other parts of the world . . .³⁹
(emphasis added)

Similarly, in her letter to Wortley on 6 Dec. 1740 she despises the luxurious customs in Naples.⁴⁰ But she praises the frugal lifestyle and customs of the inhabitants of Venice in her letter to Lady Pomfret.⁴¹ In her letters to Abbé Conti and to Lady Rich in September 1718 she ridicules

³⁸ Later, in her letter to her sister, Lady Mar, in April 1727 Lady Mary again identifies herself with Fénelon:
I . . . am as full of moral reflections as either Cambrai or Pascal. I think of nothing but the nothingness of the good things of this world, the transitoriness of its joys, the pungency of its sorrows.

³⁹ Letters 1: 255.

⁴⁰ Letters 2: 214.

⁴¹ Letters 2: 154.

the extravagant make-up of the French women.⁴² She makes the observation to Montagu from Avignon on 17 Feb. 1744 that because the ladies in Avignon prefer foreign stuff to their own silk, the tradesmen are consequently impoverished.⁴³ Looking at the time-span of the references to luxury in her letters (1716-1744), we might say that Lady Mary maintains a consistent attitude towards conspicuous consumption. On the surface, these observations are denunciations of luxury. But on the other hand, Lady Mary's approval of sumptuary laws indicates her consciousness of maintaining the class distinction and the outward symbol of the "Veblen Effect" (Veblen argues in The Theory of the Leisured Class that clothes are symbols of social respectability) which is also a manifestation of luxury. Neil McKendrick points out:

Sumptuary laws forbidding imitation were designed to reinforce their [the leisure class] élite status, to restrict the grandeur to the few, and to guarantee their sense of separateness. In its simplest but most extreme form, the great simply monopolized a single colour.⁴⁴

So Lady Mary's praise of the sumptuary laws in Nuremburg can

⁴² Letters 1: 444, 438-40.

⁴³ Letters 2: 320.

⁴⁴ McKendrick 37.

also be seen as endorsing class hierarchy.

But what is more problematic is Lady Mary's attitude towards the luxury in Islamic culture, namely, the culture reflected in her letters written during her sojourn in Turkey. Edward W. Said does not mention Lady Mary in Orientalism, which is surprising because Lady Mary was the first female in Britain who travelled to the Middle East as the wife of a governmental representative, and her recorded comments on exotic cultures deserve attention. According to Said, Orientalism is decidedly the manifestation of the European cultural hegemony:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might

have had different views on the matter.⁴⁵

But, obviously, Lady Mary's views on the Orient (to be specific, Turkey, as she did not travel to the Far East) do not fit into Said's general observation. I cannot find the hegemony of European ideas that Said mentions in Lady Mary's comments on Islamic culture with regard to luxury--rather, she provides the reader with perspectives other than the "Orientalist" perspective of Europeans.

According to Robert Halsband, Lady Mary found Islamic ideas and institutions sympathetic and often stimulating.⁴⁶ She has the insight to notice that the term "reputation" had different meanings in England and on the Continent. On the Continent, "reputation" was almost the synonym for sexual prowess. Lady Mary points out the relativity of moral standards in different cultures. For example, from the perspective of Mahomet's doctrine, which encourages women to procreate, all the Christian saints should be regarded as libertines:

Voilà des Maximes terriblement contraires à vos couvents. Que deviendront vos Saintes Catherines, Thérèses, Claires, & toute la bande de vos pieuses Vierges & Veuves? lesquelles, étant jugées par ce

⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) 7.

⁴⁶ Halsband 85.

systeme de vertu, sont des infâmes, qui ont passé toute leur vie dans un libertinage effroyable.⁴⁷

Contrary to the general notion that Islamic women were the most enslaved among the world's women, Lady Mary asserts satirically, in her letter to Lady Mar on 1 April 1717, that she looks upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire, because they have economic independence, hence are free to carry on adultery under the protection of veils without being detected by their husbands:

You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lovers' indiscretion, since we see so many that have the courage to expose themselves to that in this world and all the threatened punishment of the next, which is never preached to the Turkish damsels. Neither have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands, those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands, which they take with 'em upon a divorce with an addition which he is obliged to give 'em. Upon the whole,

⁴⁷ Here are Maxims for you, prodigiously contrary to those of your Convents. What will become of your Saint Catharines, your Saint Theresas, your Saint Claras, and the whole Bead-roll of your holy Virgins and Widows? Who, if they are to be judged by this System of Virtue, will be found to have been infamous Creatures, that passed their whole Lives in a most abominable Libertinism. (Letters 1: 376.)

I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire.⁴⁸

It is arguable here that Lady Mary was satirically attacking the English society which allowed women even less freedom than the enslaved Islamic women rather than allowing sexual promiscuity.⁴⁹ Yet, placing the above observation (that Turkish women are enviable for their sexual freedom) in the context of Lady Mary's general comment on the Islamic notion of luxury, or, to be specific, the Islamic value of good life, one still cannot be sure of Lady Mary's moral stance. We are merely, as Althusser points out, "seeing, perceiving and feeling," but not "knowing."⁵⁰ Lady Mary's use of a half-joking, half-serious tone invites us to see the "hegemonic" European moralist view of luxury from an "internal distance" and hence question its validity.

In fact, in Lady Mary's Turkish letters the European bourgeois values of frugality and industry are constantly challenged, as the Turks held a life philosophy contrary to these bourgeois values, yet they seemed happy. We are led by Lady Mary to ponder on the issue of whether hedonism is a

⁴⁸ Letters 1: 329.

⁴⁹ On this particular issue, one can read Joseph W. Lew, "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1991): 432-50.

⁵⁰ Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy 204.

better choice of life. In her letter to Abbé Conti she says that the Turks might have a right notion of life while they spend their whole life in sensuous pursuit, and the study of present pleasure is most beneficial to mankind. The Stoicism of the English, on the other hand, might result in loss of time and damage of health.⁵¹ Interestingly, the later moralist Samuel Johnson seems to have shared Lady Mary's speculation. His Rasselas is a dramatization of this perennial human quest for the correct choice of life. In a letter describing the beauty of the royal palace she visited, Lady Mary points out:

You know how to divide the idea of pleasure from that of vice, and they are only mingled in the heads of fools--but I allow you to laugh at me for the sensual declaration that I had rather a rich Effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge.⁵²

Apart from this "sensuous declaration," the playful tone of which invites different speculations on the reader's part, Lady Mary also observes that sometimes luxury and idleness could have positive effects on the development of a country's science. As she says in her letter to Abbé Conti in February 1718, because of luxury and idleness, the Turks

⁵¹ Letters 1: 415.

⁵² Letters 1: 415.

enjoy a long period of peace; consequently, their science has flourished.⁵³ In the same letter, with amazing liberal-mindedness, Lady Mary quotes the words of an Effendi, which justify the existence of luxury, saying that it is part of God's design for people to enjoy:

Nous avons logé à Belgrade chez un grand Effendi, fort riche, homme d'esprit, de savoir, & d'une humeur fort agréable. Nous fumes environ un mois dans sa maison, & il mangeoit toujours avec nous, buvant du vin sans scrupule. Comme je le raillai un peu là-dessus, il me répondit en souriant, que toutes les créatures du monde ont été faites pour le plaisir de l'homme; & que Dieu n'auroit pas laissé croître la vigne, s'il y avoit du péché à en goûter le jus: mais que cependant la Loy qui en défendoit l'usage au vulgaire, étoit fort sage; parce que ces sortes de gens n'ont pas assez d'esprit, pour s'en servir avec modération.⁵⁴

⁵³ Letters 1: 376.

John Thelwall makes a similar observation on the connection between luxury and the flourishing of science in "The Rights of Nature Against the Usurpations of Establishments" (London, 1796). See Gregory Claeys, Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-1860 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 29.

⁵⁴ At Belgrade we lodged with a great and rich Effendi, a man of wit and learning, and of a very agreeable humour. We were in his house about a month, and he did constantly eat with us, drinking wine without any scruple. As I

In the history of Islamic culture, there are numerous instances of support for luxury-hedonism. The famous Persian philosopher ibn-Sina (980-1037), for example, justified his alcoholic addiction by saying: "By religious law wine is illegal for the fool; by intellectual law it is legal for the intelligent."⁵⁵ The Persian-born, Iraqi-educated poet Abu-Nuwas (750-814) wrote khamriyat (wine songs) in praise of hedonism.⁵⁶ Contrary to the Saidian Orientalism, Lady Mary's affirmation of Islamic values in terms of luxury implies a criticism of the Puritan values of her own culture, or at least leads the reader to question her stance in the luxury debate before and after her sojourn in Turkey.

The interrogativeness of the text of Lady Mary's letters certainly did not escape the attention of her contemporaries. Horace Walpole, after reading some of the letters in 1751, declared that they are charming but they

rallied him a little on this subject, he answered me smiling, that all the creatures in the world were made for the pleasure of man, and that God would not have let the vine grow, were it a sin to taste of its juice: but that nevertheless the law, which forbids the use of it to the vulgar, was very wise; because such sort of folks have not sense enough to take it with moderation. (Letters 1: 377.)

⁵⁵ Philip K. Hitti, Islam: A Way of Life (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970) 127.

⁵⁶ Hitti 145.

have likewise "as much of the spirit of debauchery as you will conceive in her writing."⁵⁷ Mary Astell, her spiritual mentor, was worried about Lady Mary's moral reputation. According to Ruth Perry, Mary Astell's biographer, Astell had a dream about Lady Mary's drowning--"Shipwreck" was her word for social ruin--in which Mary Astell leaped into the raging sea to Lady Mary's aid. In a letter Astell writes:

Methought I saw you last night with agony of soul, shipwrecked, struggling for life with the insulting billows of indifference. I cried, I begged, but all in vain. Yet they would take a boat by you and try to assist you. Not one would run you least hazard, or so much as spoil their fine clothes in your service. Whereupon I threw myself out of the window into the sea, resolved to save. . . you.⁵⁸

But although Perry has recorded this fact, she has not connected Astell's preface to the "Turkish Letters" with her attempt to save Lady Mary's moral reputation. According to Perry's interpretation, the preface was only meant to recommend Lady Mary's "superior gifts." She uses the

⁵⁷ Lewis Gibbs, The Admirable Lady Mary: The Life and Times of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1949) 158.

⁵⁸ Ruth Perry, The Celebrated Mary Astell: an Early English Feminist (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) 144.

quotation from Astell's preface to demonstrate this point:

In this letter to posterity she urged others to share her pride of gender, and not to envy or grudge the writer her superior gifts. "Let the Men malign one another, if they think fit, and strive to pull down merit when they cannot equal it . . . Rather let us freely own the superiority of this Sublime Genius as I do in the sincerity of my Soul, pleas'd that a Woman Triumphs, and proud to follow in her Train."⁵⁹

But if we look at Astell's preface closely, we would discover that she is deliberately trying to cover her friend's "spirit of debauchery" as noticed by Horace Walpole. One particular passage from the preface is worth noticing:

But as her Ladyship's penetration discovers the inmost follies of the heart, so the candor of her temper passes over them with an air of pity rather than reproach, treating with the politeness of Court and gentleness of a Lady what the severity of her Judgment cannot but Condemn.⁶⁰

Here it is obvious that Mary Astell is attempting to convince the reader that the lack of criticism (in fact,

⁵⁹ Perry 276.

⁶⁰ Letters 1: 467.

condoning) of luxury and moral irregularities on Lady Mary's part is chiefly due to her "pity" or "politeness of Court" and "gentleness of a Lady", not incapability of moral judgment.

3. Lady Mary's views on class hierarchy and political virtues as related to luxury

Confusion can be found in Lady Mary's attitudes towards class hierarchy. As I noted in Chapter I, the concept of luxury is invariably connected with the concept of class. The eighteenth century moralists incessantly advised that people should not forget their own class status; it was luxury on the part of the lower-class to be dissatisfied with their lot and to imitate their superiors. On one hand, Lady Mary took the democratic stance of John Locke and asserted that human beings were universally equal. On the other hand, "she championed the aristocracy" and "condemned the 'levelling principle'," as Robert Halsband notes.⁶¹

In her youth Lady Mary told Montagu in 1711 that if one could change the place of one's birth, she would be a farmer's daughter.⁶² In No. 6 of The Nonsense of Common Sense, her series of anti-Opposition papers, she points out:

⁶¹ Halsband 255-6.

⁶² Letters 1: 61.

Birth and money were accidents of fortune, that no man was to be seriously despised for wanting; that an honest faithful servant was a character of more value than an insolent corrupt lord; That the real distinction between man and man lay in his integrity, which in one shape or other generally met with its reward in the world, and could not fail of giving the highest pleasure, by a consciousness of virtue, which every man feels that is so happy to possess it.⁶³

Even in her later years (Lady Mary grew more conservative in her old age), in a letter to Lady Bute on 22 July 1752, she still voices her Lockean democratic views on human equality, pointing out that humankind is everywhere the same, like cherries or apples, though different in size, shape or colour, essentially the same species.⁶⁴ In No. 1 of The Nonsense of Common Sense she shows herself compassionate towards the industrious poor.⁶⁵ Unlike most of her

⁶³ The Nonsense of Common Sense 27.

⁶⁴ Letters 3: 15.

⁶⁵ Yet, in spite of her sympathy (though patronizingly) with the poor people, Lady Mary still retained her complacency with the status quo of class hierarchy. While attacking luxury in the rich, Lady Mary tells the lower-class not to envy the rich, because the latter have their worries and afflictions. In No. 8 of The Nonsense of Common Sense she admonishes the poor people not to envy their superiors, because the rich have more to worry about and are more subject to infamy and shame.

contemporaries, who constantly admonish the poor to be industrious, Lady Mary was perceptive enough to realize that, because of the class-exploitation in her day, industry could not save the lower-class from poverty. On her journey to Constantinople she "would have paid the poor people, but reflected ironically that the money would have been taken away by the oppressors."⁶⁶ This near-levelling attitude towards class has its background in the Whig-supremacy in Lady Mary's time. According to G. E. Mingay, in the Walpolean regime "The political hegemony of the great Whig lords grew with the widening of the economic gap between them and the country gentry; their alliance with merchants and financiers paralleled the ramification of their interests in commerce and industry."⁶⁷ Lady Mary's democratic ideas obviously have their roots in her own sympathy with the Whigs whose financial interests necessitated the endorsement of class mobility.

Yet, in her later years, Lady Mary became more and more class-prejudiced. In a letter to Lady Bute on 23 July 1753 she comments angrily on the merging of classes and on the lower-class appearing as protagonists in novels, saying

⁶⁶ Gibbs 119.

⁶⁷ G. E. Mingay, The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class (London and New York: Longman, 1976) 72.

that she is much against the Levelling Principle and renounces her belief in democracy.⁶⁸ Later, in her letter to Lady Bute on 30 Nov. 1753, Lady Mary also voices her discontent with the master-servant relationship in England by praising the docility of the Italian servants.⁶⁹ This change in attitude towards class in Lady Mary seems to be retrogressive considering that in her later years the economic and social conditions of the gentry to which she belonged were facing ultimate decline. Actually, according to Mingay's historical records, the aristocrat's position in the political system was further entrenched in the later half of the eighteenth century as the leadership derived from a succession of great commoners--Walpole, the two Pitts, and Peel, and Gladstone.⁷⁰ We can say that, in general, Lady Mary tended to be more conservative and class-conscious when she grew old. But her attitudes towards class and class hierarchy are ambivalent and they suggest that ideologies are sometimes independent from, or autonomous of, the economic base that produced the

⁶⁸ Letters 3: 36.

⁶⁹ Letters 3: 46.

⁷⁰ Mingay 74.

ideologies, as Althusser contends.⁷¹

On the issue of luxury and political virtue Lady Mary's attitude is one that invites the reader's interrogation as well. To understand her stance we must see her views against the background of her time. In fact, the connection between political virtue and luxury was made long before Lady Mary by Niccolo Machiavelli, in particular, his Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy.⁷² According to Machiavelli, the collapse in civic spirit is a result of the pursuit of luxury by the political leaders. In Imperial Rome, individuals channelled their energies into the pursuit of wealth and luxury at the expense of public service. The old republican virtues of dedication to the city-state were thrown aside as the nation's capable individuals were corrupted by the increase in luxury. Machiavelli thinks it

⁷¹ According to Althusser, society is a decentred structure, within which the various levels of the superstructure are not the reflections of one essential level (the economic level for Marxists). In fact, the levels possess a "relative autonomy," existing within the social formation in complex relations of inner contradiction and mutual conflict. However, ultimately, these levels are determined by the economic level. See Louis Althusser, For Marx trans. Ben Brewster, (London: Allen Lane, 1969) 113. It should be noted that this "autonomy" theory of Althusser is not without its weakness, as pointed out by Terry Eagleton in Criticism and Ideology (86). Raymond Williams also tries to deal with the relation between superstructure and the economic base in Problems in Materialism and Culture.

⁷² Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses trans. L. Walker, ed. Bernard Crick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

is important to emphasize the moral integrity of the rulers as a means of achieving political stability. In England, James Harrington's The Commonwealth of Oceana (1656) presents more or less the same idea, in a republican way. In Harrington's opinion, there should be a constitution impregnable against corruption, and a nation should be free from monarchy, but supported by citizens of Machiavellian virtue.⁷³ Harrington's theory has its Tory version in Bolingbroke, whose The Idea of a Patriot King (1738) conveys a similar notion of Machiavellian virtue but without Harrington's republicanism. Since the Glorious Revolution, Bolingbroke contends, the means of influencing by money and governing by corruption had increased phenomenally. Changes in the structure and management of the public revenue had wrought fundamental constitutional changes. Like a Pandora's box, the Revolution and its new financial order had spread corruption and evil over Britain. Taxes had increased, as had officers of the revenue who claimed power over men of superior rank. According to Kramnick, Bolingbroke thought that a spirit of rapine, venality, fraud, corruption, luxury, and avarice had overtaken the land since 1688.⁷⁴

⁷³ For detailed information on Harrington, see J. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, 333-505.

⁷⁴ Bolingbroke, quoted by Kramnick 28.

Walpole, on the other hand, defended political corruption/patronage vigorously. In a speech of 1734 defending the Septennial Act, Walpole told the members of the Commons that corruption marked a healthy political system; was it not easier to bribe when a political community was ideologically unified and when little partisanship divided it? In such a case, he added, where corruption, and not ideology, solidified attachments, corruption was less dangerous. His ministerial paper The London Journal defended corruption on one occasion as a fact of modern life, like the standing army and the riot act; saying "it was a result of the present circumstances of the world, the natural condition of human affairs."⁷⁵ Moreover, Walpole contended that without corruption the constitution would not function properly. The excellence and perfection of the constitution consisted in the balance of power being divided among the three parts of the legislature. Only through the disposal of these places of honor, profit and trust in the civil, military, and ecclesiastical establishment could the monarch hold his place in the constitutional balance. The existence of the noble and glorious mixed constitution depended on the existence of political corruption (patronage). If the dependencies created by place were taken away, the monarchy could not

⁷⁵ Walpole, quoted by Kramnick 121.

stand, and mixed government would fall.⁷⁶

Lady Mary has been regarded by her numerous biographers and critics as a firm supporter of Robert Walpole and a strong opponent of Bolingbroke. Yet, interestingly, in an essay unpublished during her lifetime, entitled "An Expedient to Put a Stop to the Spreading Vice of Corruption" (1737), she attacks luxury and corruption in a way which resembles the views of Harrington and echoes most of Bolingbroke's arguments. She says:

There is no occasion for eloquent declamations to prove the daily growth of this fashionable vice: every man's own memory will furnish him with almost as many instances of it, as he has neighbors or acquaintance, and most men's own consciences present them with some certain knowledge of it. The evil effect of it in the public administration has long been the theme of that virtuous patriot, the Craftsman, but I wish with all my heart it would stop there, (with his leave). The effect it has on private life is much worse, the neglect of public honor lessens and at length takes off all regard, to the private, the mind takes a turn of being vain of infamy, and every sort of baseness is not only avow'd but

⁷⁶ Walpole, quoted by Kramnick 122-3.

applauded if it appears profitable, all the sentiments of humanity or gratitude are look'd upon as childish prejudices, and people of the highest rank in life, talk every day over their wine, and tea, maxims one would only expect to hear in the holds of Newgate, they transfer the praise that was once given to generosity, valour, and integrity to embroider'd coats, Brussels lace, jewels and equipage . . . nothing is mean that leads to the great end of acquiring money without which there can be no fine houses nor fine equipages, and this seems to be truly the universal passion . . . so far corruption influences our national morality, as to learning of what kind so ever it is all most equally destructive to it.⁷⁷

Here we sense the multiplicity of equal voices in literary texts discussed by Bakhtin, Althusser and others, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter. The beginning of the essay is obviously an ironic reference to Bolingbroke's Opposition paper The Craftsman. But later on in the essay there is a paraphrase of The Craftsman No. 124 (16 Nov. 1728) which attacks luxury and corruption in political leadership.

⁷⁷ The Nonsense of Common Sense 45.

It is also noteworthy that in this essay Lady Mary almost reiterates Bolingbroke's image of the leader in an ideal polity. According to Bolingbroke, the true statesmen were wholly public men, eloquent and learned, dedicated selflessly to the community. Such men were noble and of virtuous character, and were capable of resisting their passions and self-interest so that they spoke and pleaded for the common weal.⁷⁸ Lady Mary's proposal is highly Machiavellian in this respect:

Merit would then be the road to preferment, emulation would be rais'd amongst the younger sort, and every one endeavor to shine in his profession when there was no other way to be distinguished in it, sense, probity, and courage would be recommendations at court, instead of the influence over a county, or the part play'd at the last election⁷⁹

Interestingly, while she attacks Walpole's corrupt political system, at the same time she shows some understanding of his dilemma:

Sir R. W. is as honest as his present post gives him leave to be, and when ever he acts contrary to his principles of justice and good nature, he

⁷⁸ Kramnick 103.

⁷⁹ The Nonsense of Common Sense 47.

thinks himself led into it by the temptation of
fear or necessity⁸⁰

Althusser's theory that art can make us see,
perceive but not know, is manifested most clearly in Lady
Mary's proposal that parliament should be abolished:

I humbly propose we may have no more parliament,
and that I may be heard impartially with a few
words in favour of this bold proposition, before
it be absolutely condemn'd. I entirely agree with
our patriots that parliaments are an essential
part of our body politic, and I believe no man
alive will deny but that legs and arms are
essential and useful parts of the human body, but
when a leg or an arm is so far corrupted, that
there appears no possibility of restoring it to
its primitive soundness all wise physicians advise
the lopping it to stop the spreading of
corruption, and no man would be thought in his
senses that would chose to perish whole, rather
than lose a part that no longer answer'd the end
of its being⁸¹

Bolingbroke demanded the independence of parliament and its
freedom from ministerial control; Walpole denied any

⁸⁰ The Nonsense of Common Sense 47.

⁸¹ The Nonsense of Common Sense 46.

representation of commoners, asserting that parliament was itself a development of feudal obligations and the people could have no right in choosing or participating in government. Viewed in this context, Lady Mary's proposal could be regarded as a protest against Walpole's corrupt parliament. Yet, the ironic tone, reminiscent of Swift's "A Modest Proposal," cautions us: was this solution meant to be interpreted reverse to its literal meaning? A straightforward reading might be in conflict with Lady Mary's alleged political allegiance. The decentredness of the text lends itself open to various speculations. One piece of biographical evidence, however, is certain. According to Robert Halsband, Montagu, her husband, "could not have approved of her facetious proposal to abolish parliament where he was to sit . . . until 1761."⁸² Halsband also mentions in his biography that "The Audacious 'Expedient' was apparently never printed. Its seditious proposal would certainly have put its printer (and author, if known) in danger of arrest and imprisonment."⁸³ This evidence suggests that at least some of Lady Mary's contemporaries did not regard her proposal as an ironic one. But the multiplicity of the voices inside this essay, that is, the coexistence of Lady Mary's support for Walpole's

⁸² The Nonsense of Common Sense xx.

⁸³ Halsband 164.

economic policy and her notion of the Machiavellian virtue, certainly invalidates any monological reading.

4. Lady Mary's views on female education as a means of combating luxury

Lady Mary's views on luxury are also closely related to her idea of education (perhaps not exclusively of female education).⁸⁴ She believed that women, if properly educated, would find more pleasure in learning than in the pursuit of luxury; therefore, adequate female education was the best way to combat luxury and to form better moral character. Her "feminist" pamphlet Women Not Inferior to Men, written under the pseudonym "Sophia,"⁸⁵ discusses the

⁸⁴ In her letters, she constantly admonished her son the young Edward Wortley Montagu against luxury. In a letter on 10 June 1742 she tells her husband that she has advised their son to the following effect: "that the true figure of a man was the opinion the world had of his sense and probity, and not the idle expenses, which were only respected by foolish or ignorant people"

In another letter, dated on 12 Jan. 1744 she again says: "It is my opinion he should have no distinction in equipage from any other cornet, and everything of that sort will only serve to blow his vanity" Later, she severely criticizes her son for his extravagance and luxury. In a letter to her husband on 10 Sept. 1748 she says that she has told young Edward Wortley Montagu that an embroidered coat or rich livery could only gain esteem from fools; only prudence and decency could recommend a man. However, the main focus of Lady Mary's idea of education is on females.

⁸⁵ The authorship of this pamphlet is still uncertain. Isobel Grundy told me in a recent conversation that the author could possibly be Hester Chapone.

relation between luxury and learning:

It is that [learning] which enables us to distinguish between right and wrong, true and false. And finally, that [learning] alone can give us skill to regulate our passions by teaching us, that true happiness and virtue consist not so much in enlarging our possessions as in contracting our desires. (emphasis added)

Also, on 15 April 1755 Lady Mary observes, in a letter to Lady Bute, that a woman's errors in morals and conduct are generally caused by lack of education.⁸⁶

Actually, Lady Mary's idea of education has a two-way function: the reproduction of submission and manipulation. To be more specific: on one hand, Lady Mary's idea of education represents her contemporary male moralists' view that female luxury was detrimental to the national economy, and education as a substitution for the pursuit of luxury is a good way to "decommodify" females. Swift was strongly against female luxury in his essay "Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons":

It is not the highest Indignity to human nature, that men should be such poltroons as to suffer the

⁸⁶ Education, I have said all I have to say on that head, and [I am] still of the same opinion, that learning is necessary to the happiness of women, and ignorance the common foundation of their errors, both in morals and conduct. (Letters 3: 83.)

Kingdom and themselves to be undone, by the Vanity, the Folly, the Pride, and Wantonness of their Wives, who under their present Corruptions seem to be a kind of animal suffered for our sins to be sent into the world for the Destruction of Families, Societies, and Kingdoms; and whose whole study seems directed to be as expensive as they possibly can in every useless article of living, who by long practice can reconcile the most pernicious foreign Drugs to their health and pleasure, provided they are but expensive; as Starlings grow fat with henbane: who contract a Robustness by meer practice of Sloth and Luxury: who can play deep several hours after midnight, sleep beyond noon, revel upon Indian poisons, and spend the revenue of a moderate family to adorn a nauseous unwholesome living Carcase.⁸⁷

The most visible aspect of female luxury is, of course, clothes. As McKendrick argues, clothes were the first mass consumer products to be noticed by contemporary observers. Lady Mary's advice is to educate women to devote their attention to worthwhile pursuits instead of luxury in clothes. In No. 2 of The Nonsense of Common Sense she tells

⁸⁷ Jonathan Swift, "Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons," Prose Works 22: 80. I am indebted to Laura Brown for this quotation.

women to substitute some more improving amusements than indulgence in luxury in dress: "What a great advantage then will they bring to their country by the suppression of luxury, when the plainest dress will be thought the genteelest" ⁸⁸ To convince her contemporary women that luxury in dress, which creates beauty in appearance, does not indicate merit, Lady Mary further argues in No. 7 of The Nonsense of Common Sense that virtue and rationality are the only criteria in judging a woman. To be sure, Lady Mary did think that the male should be responsible for the female's "commodification." In her letter to Bishop Gilbert Burnet she points out that women's luxury in dress and concern for appearance were caused by the commodification of females, by the pressure of living in a male-dominant society where social attentions were on women's outer appearance with a view to make them the objects of men's lust:

We are taught to place all our art in adorning our outward forms, and permitted, without reproach, to carry that custom even to extravagancy, while our minds are entirely neglected, and by disuse of reflections, filled with nothing but the trifling objects our eyes are daily entertained with. . . its being so easy for any man of sense, that finds

⁸⁸ The Nonsense of Common Sense 6.

it either his interest or his pleasure, to corrupt them.⁸⁹

These instances indicate that although Lady Mary's view on female luxury was largely a reproduction of the ruling ideology (male ideology) of the "agents of exploitation and repression" (Althusser), she was not unaware of where the responsibility of "female commodification" lies.

However, on the other hand, when it comes to the issue of what kind of attitude the women themselves should adopt towards their education, Lady Mary is all for the "submission to the ruling ideology" (Althusser). Ruth Perry notices in her discussion of Mary Astell that "The period following the Glorious Revolution was a time for reasserting male authority and for reinventing all the reasons for women's subservience to men."⁹⁰ Lady Mary was not unaware of the unfair treatment that English women received,⁹¹ and she professes herself a female educator whose mission is to "teach women sense to make them virtuous" in No. 6 of The

⁸⁹ Letters 1: 44-5.

⁹⁰ Ruth Perry, "Mary Astell and the Feminist Critique of Possessive Individualism," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1990): 449.

⁹¹ Lady Mary had been sensitive in her life to the deplorable situation of English women. In her letter to Edward Wortley Montagu on 14 Nov. 1710 she commented on the fact that women were regarded as mere chattels in England: "People in my way are sold like slaves, and I cannot tell what price my master will put on me."

Nonsense of Common Sense.⁹² Yet, in spite of her complaint that in England learned women were treated much worse than their counterparts in Italy, where women could be given professorships in universities,⁹³ she strongly asserts that women should hide their learning as much as possible--in fact, she advocates women's submission to the ruling male ideology of that time, namely, the female invisibility which I discussed above, as propounded by John Brown, John Gregory (1724-1773), Hester Chapone (1721-1801) and Lady Sarah Pennington.⁹⁴ While emphasizing the importance of education for women in her letter to Lady Bute concerning her granddaughter, Lady Mary admonishes her granddaughters not to expect any applause from their learning because it was

⁹² The Nonsense of Common Sense 25.

⁹³ Lady Mary tells her daughter, Lady Bute on 10 Oct. 1753 that
 To say the truth, there is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England . . . we are educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle our natural reason; if some few get above their nurses' instructions, our knowledge must rest concealed and be as useless to the world as gold in the mine. I am now speaking according to our English notions, which may wear out (some ages hence) along with others equally absurd. (Letters 3: 40.)

⁹⁴ John Brown's "Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times" (1757), John Gregory's "A Father's Legacy to his Daughters" (London: 1793), Hester Chapone's "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind" (London: 1773) and Lady Sarah Pennington, "A Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters" (London: 1793) all assert that women should be silent in public, and reading books could only serve the purpose of improving discernment and rendering taste elegant.

the man who was supposed to "shine".⁹⁵ In order to avoid envy and hatred, they should take care to conceal their learning:

The second caution to be given her (and which is most absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness. The parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy, and consequently the most inveterate hatred, of all he and she fools.⁹⁶

It should also be noted that in her scheme of female education Lady Mary did not advocate putting women's education to any active purpose as some later female education advocates, such as Sarah Scott or Mary Wollstonecraft, did. She did not seem to think that women's

⁹⁵ If your daughters are inclined to love reading, do not check their inclination by hindering them of the diverting part of it. It is as necessary for the amusement of women as the reputation of men; but teach them not to expect or desire any applause from it. Let their brothers shine, and let them content themselves with making their lives easier by it, which I experimentally know is more effectually done by study than any other way. Ignorance is as much the fountain of vice as idleness and indeed generally produces it. People that do not read or work for a livelihood have many hours they know not how to employ, especially women, who commonly fall into vapours or something worse.

(Letters 2: 449-50.)

⁹⁶ Letters 3: 22.

education might be useful to society. What she could perceive was that education would make women better wives and, if they chose to lead a celibate life, to make them happy in their single state.⁹⁷

Katharine M. Rogers points out in Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England, "typical of her class and period, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu accepted as proper, or at least inevitable, the institutional restrictions on women."⁹⁸ One of her biographers, Lewis Gibbs, also says about her in general: "She might be unconventional in her behavior and independent in her way of thinking, but it was always within limits which she could not change, and which, on the whole, she accepted without question."⁹⁹ I would add that Lady Mary's ideas on female education serve as a reinforcement of the established order and the male ruling

⁹⁷ Lady Mary told Lady Bute on 28 Jan. 1753, "Learning if she (Lady Bute's daughter) has a real taste for it will not only make her contented but happy in it. No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting. She will not want new fashions nor regret the loss of expensive diversions or variety of company if she can be amused with an author in her closet The ultimate end of your education was to make you a good wife (and I have the comfort to hear that you are one); hers (Lady Bute's daughter's) ought to be, to make her happy in a virgin state." (Letters 2: 449-50.)

⁹⁸ Katharine M. Rogers, Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 94.

⁹⁹ Gibbs 15.

ideology of her time. She was not a "feminist" at all in the modern sense of the term. But her attitudes towards luxury and education are still worth noticing because they reflect, to a certain degree, how a female of the eighteenth-century English upper-class responded in an "interrogative" way to one of her age's most controversial issues.

Chapter III Veering between Two Ideological Worlds: Mary Wollstonecraft

 If Lady Mary is not a real "feminist", as I argue in the preceding chapter, then it might be said that Mary Wollstonecraft certainly is. Wollstonecraft has been the focus of much attention, especially by recent eighteenth-century scholars. But although her works have been examined from many aspects, so far her views on luxury and the relation between luxury and female education have not been the subject of any single sustained study. The present chapter attempts to fill this gap.

 To understand why Wollstonecraft's views on luxury and female education are remarkably different from those of her predecessors and contemporaries, one needs to know something of the socio-economic condition of women in late eighteenth-century England. According to Ivy Pinchbeck, the roles of English middle-class women underwent substantial changes during and after the industrial revolution. Except in the trades conducted chiefly by women, such as dressmaking, women's activity in the business sphere decreased in the eighteenth century. This decrease in productive activity was due first to social changes that followed an increase in wealth, and secondly to the reorganization demanded by commercial and industrial

changes.¹ Since women became less involved in active labour, they were encouraged to be decorative and indolent, largely to enhance their husbands' social respectability. Defoe foresaw this social phenomenon which became common in the later part of the eighteenth century:

. . . the tradesman is folly vain of making his wife a gentlewoman, forsooth; he will have her sit above in the parlour, receive visits, drink tea, and entertain her neighbours, or take a coach and go abroad; but as to business, she shall not stoop to touch it; he has apprentices, and journeymen, and there is no need of it.²

Barbara Taylor makes similar remarks on the changed situation of middle-class women as a result of the rise of capitalism.³ As for lower-class women, because of the

¹ Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (London: Cass, 1969) 282.

² Daniel Defoe, Complete English Tradesman (London: 1729) 287.

³ "A revolution in the scale and character of commercial operations had led to the replacement of family labour (particularly female family labour) by waged employees, while at the same time the expansion of personal wealth had encouraged nouveau-riche men to view their homes, and the women within them, as display cases for their affluence. Women who had once made an essential contribution to family economies became idle, decorative accessories to their husbands" Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 4.

disappearance of small farms as a consequence of the enclosure movement, they lost economic opportunities and independence. It was under these particular economic circumstances that Wollstonecraft's views on luxury and female education were formed. My discussion focuses chiefly on the following aspects: 1. Wollstonecraft's views on luxury 2. Wollstonecraft's views on class and class relationships as related to luxury 3. Wollstonecraft's views on trade and commerce 4. Wollstonecraft's views on sexual mores and female education

1. Wollstonecraft's views on luxury

Wollstonecraft's attitude towards luxury is, on the whole, negative. In almost all of her works she condemns conspicuous consumption and voluptuousness. In Mary, the ruinous effect of luxury is illustrated symbolically by the dilapidation of the old mansion.⁴ The narrator disdainfully describes members of the upper class who were "hurrying from one party of pleasure to another." In The Wrongs of Woman

⁴ " . . . an old mansion-house, which had been once the abode of luxury. Some tattered shreds of rich hangings still remained, covered with cobwebs and filth; round the ceiling, through which the rain drop'd, was a beautiful cornice mouldering; and a spacious gallery was rendered dark by the broken windows being blocked up; through the apertures the wind forced its way in hollow sounds, and reverberated along the former scene of festivity." Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman ed. Gary Kelly (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) 50. See Kelly's note on 214.

the male protagonist Darnford despises the depraved, luxurious lifestyle of his upper-class parents. But most obvious of all, in A Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (1794) Wollstonecraft echoes the cyclical view of history by maintaining that luxury "stopped the progress of civilization" and led to war; soldiers "were hired by the rich to secure to them the quiet enjoyment of their luxuries."⁵ She observes: "We find . . . the Roman empire crumbling into atoms, from the germ of a deadly malady implanted in its vitals; whilst voluptuousness stopped the progress of civilization, which makes the perfection of the arts the dawn of science. . . ."⁶ She also points to the morally debasing effect of luxury on human beings. Men "have poisoned the noble qualities of nature by imbibing some of the habits of degenerate refinement."⁷ Rendered effeminate by luxury, men can never obtain freedom.⁸ But Wollstonecraft certainly does not limit her attack on luxury to a general condemnation. As the following discussion indicates, she deals with many

⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (London: Joseph Johnson, 1794) 225.

⁶ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 3.

⁷ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 487-514.

⁸ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 468-9.

other aspects of luxury as well.

Wollstonecraft has never been noted as a profound thinker or an original philosopher. But she belonged to the bourgeois class whose ideology is, according to Georg Lukács, an embodiment of tragic dialectics; that is, the self-interest of the bourgeoisie conflicts with its insight into the nature of things. Lukács points out:

The tragic dialectics of the bourgeoisie can be seen in the fact that it is not only desirable but essential for it to clarify its own class interests on every particular issue, while at the same time such a clear awareness becomes fatal when it is extended to the question of the totality.⁹

My reading of Wollstonecraft's views on luxury and female education highlights the dialectical movement in her works which has been unduly ignored by her critics so far.

As I mentioned in Chapter I, A. D. McKillop and A. O. Lovejoy point out that in the eighteenth century the opposition to luxury usually takes the form of primitivism. The discussion of Wollstonecraft's views of luxury leads us to examine her attitude towards primitivism. But, as Lukács argues, bourgeois thinkers observe economic life

⁹ Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971) 65.

consistently and necessarily from the standpoint of the individual capitalist, and this naturally produces a sharp confrontation between the individual and the objective law of nature.¹⁰ As an individual, Wollstonecraft shared the primitivistic inclination of many Romanticists; yet as a member of the bourgeoisie whose financial success largely depends on refinement of taste and luxury in material life, she had to defend bourgeois civilization.

There are numerous passages in Wollstonecraft's works which eulogize nature and despise mechanic civilization (urbanization). In a letter to her sister Eliza on June 27 1787 Wollstonecraft points out that nature and sensibility are incompatible with sensuality.¹¹ Also, in many parts of Mary and The Wrongs of Woman the heroines rhapsodize on nature and sensibility. But Wollstonecraft's primitivist yearning for a return to nature manifests itself most clearly in her Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796). Her Wordsworthian meditation on a Norwegian mountain is an instance:

With what ineffable pleasure have I not
gazed--and gazed again, losing my breath
through my eyes--my very soul diffused itself
in the scene--and, seeming to become all

¹⁰ Lukács 63.

¹¹ See Kelly's notes on Mary 221.

senses, glided in the scarcely agitated
 waves, melted in the freshening breeze . . .
 and, imperceptibly recalling the reverie of
 childhood, I bowed before the awful throne of
 my Creator, whilst I rested on its
 footstool.¹²

Here the passage "my very soul diffused itself in the scene-
 -and, seeming to become all senses, glided in the scarcely
 agitated waves" embodies the three features of the
 primitivistic consciousness that Michael Bell has pointed
 out in Primitivism: animism, natural piety and the rituals
 through which they are expressed, as I mentioned before (see
 pp. 40-2). The phrase "the reverie of childhood" indicates
 a longing for the pre-lapsarian untainted innocence
 reminiscent of The Prelude. Elsewhere in her letters from
 Scandinavia Wollstonecraft also voices her reverence for
 nature and admiration for the primitive "Golden Age,"
 saying: "The simplicity of the golden age among the peasants
 diffused smiles over my countenance."¹³ In A Historical and
 Moral View Wollstonecraft more than once echoes her age's
 cliché that in the urban-rural dichotomy, the former
 represents luxury and moral decay while the latter stands

¹² Mary Wollstonecraft, Letters Written during a Short
 Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark ed. C. H. Poston
 (1796, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976) 74.

¹³ Wollstonecraft, Letters 58, 12.

for moral purity:

In the provinces, likewise, more simplicity of manners prevailing, their morals were more pure . . . we have seen the inhabitants of a metropolis feeble and vitiated, and those of the provinces robust and virtuous. . . .¹⁴

Although Wollstonecraft shared with primitivists their love for nature and belief in an untainted natural state of man, she was not, however, a "pure" primitivist. Contrary to the critical commonplace that Wollstonecraft was Rousseau's avowed antagonist (leaving the issue of female education aside for the moment, for it has become a commonplace to compare Emile and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman), I believe that she actually had much in common with Rousseau; there was an affinity that even she herself was not aware of.

Primitivists assert that seclusion from the evil world is an effective way to combat luxury and its evils. But both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft were against solitude. Rousseau voices his opposition in his Lettre à d'Alembert.¹⁵ Wollstonecraft indicates her disapproval of the life of the

¹⁴ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 310, 495.

¹⁵ See Kelly's note on Mary, 211. However, in the Confession and Emile Rousseau does think that solitude and silence are friends to true pleasure.

nuns in Mary, saying that "solitude only eradicates some passions, to give strength to others; the most baneful ones. . . ."¹⁶ In A Historical and Moral View Wollstonecraft describes the secluded way of life of the French priests as both unnatural and parasitic, calling them "worms that lurked behind monastic walls."¹⁷ Wollstonecraft's opposition to seclusion from the outer world can be seen as a reaction to the social structure favored by her contemporary utopian writers (Wollstonecraft's own utopian economic thought will be discussed later in this chapter), who asserted that social harmony could be built on the fulfilment of very limited needs in a secluded social unity. Her opposition may also be viewed as an acceptance, reluctant though it might have been, of the commodious lifestyle in a capitalist society. In this respect Wollstonecraft was different from her female predecessors such as Mary Astell, who proposed to establish a Protestant nunnery; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who yearned for (but did not have) a cloistered life; and Sarah Scott, whose fictional Millenium Hall is a secular institution secluded from the outer world.

Although Wollstonecraft seems to attack Rousseau's idea of the "Golden Age" (and many critics believe that she does

¹⁶ Wollstonecraft, Mary 28-9, 211.

¹⁷ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 79.

so¹⁸) in her letters from Scandinavia, she is in fact echoing Rousseau. In Wollstonecraft's view (she misunderstood Rousseau), Rousseau's golden age of simplicity and purity is a golden age of stupidity: "The world requires, I see, the hand of man to perfect it; and as this task naturally unfolds the faculties he exercises, it is physically impossible that he should have remained in Rousseau's golden age of stupidity."¹⁹ As Arthur O. Lovejoy points out in Essays in the History of Ideas, Rousseau's picture of the state of nature is actually far from idyllic. Lovejoy asserts that in Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality,"

Primitive man is healthy, placid, and good-natured, but absolutely stupid, non-social, and non-moral. . . . civilized man is highly intelligent and morally responsible, but profoundly méchant, insincere, restless, and unhappy. Rousseau could not bring himself to accept either extreme as his ideal; the obvious way out, therefore, was to regard the mean between these extremes as the best state

¹⁸ See Poston's note in Letters 80.

¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, Letters 89.

possible.²⁰

Lovejoy also reminds us that Rousseau's Social Contract proposes a remedy for the depraved human state in the reorganization of society upon the basis of a properly drawn social compact.²¹

In Wollstonecraft's system of moral gradation in the history of the development of humankind, the savage state is superior to the civilized one because the former is more natural and the latter is corrupted by luxury. But, through the improvement of government, humankind can finally reach a civilized stage without vice.²² So actually both Wollstonecraft and Rousseau shared a belief in an improved social state through human efforts rather than the yearning for a golden past based on primitivistic ignorance.

The issue of civilization is a touchy point in the luxury debate in the eighteenth century. Semantically, in eighteenth-century English the term "civilization" was usually connected with refinement of manners and exterior polish. For instance, in 1790 Warton uses the phrase "the general growth of refinement and the progression of civilization." Burke also uses the term: "our manners, our

²⁰ Arthur O. Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1948) 32.

²¹ Lovejoy 35.

²² Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 521-2.

civilization and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization."²³ Boswell records in 1772 that Johnson would not admit "civilization" but only "civility."²⁴ Moralists equated civilization (urbanization) with the capitalist manufacturing system and blamed it for its morally debasing effect. In his book The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States (1805) Charles Hall asserts that "civilization, the study and knowledge of the sciences, and . . . the production and enjoyment of the conveniences, elegancies, and luxuries of life" was not justifiable from the viewpoint of the majority: "The civilization--manufacturing system debases the species, lessens the stature of man; enervates and diminishes man's strength and activity, consequently unfits him for defence as well as much else."²⁵

Wollstonecraft's attitude towards civilization was ambiguous. Like Charles Hall, she noted the morally destructive effect of civilization. In her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) she comments: "In short, women in

²³ "civilization." OED. 2nd ed.

²⁴ James Boswell, Life of Johnson, Together with Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales eds. Hill-Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-64) 2: 155.

²⁵ As quoted by Gregory Claeys in Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-1860 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 30.

general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit."²⁶ In A Historical and Moral View the term "civilized" is used in a derogatory context: "Let us examine the catalogue of the vices of men in a savage state, and contrast them with those of men civilized; we shall find, that a barbarian, considered as a moral being, is an angel, compared with the refined villain of artificial life."²⁷ Evidently here "civilized" means artificial and villainous. She also observes: ". . . civilization has hitherto been only a perfection of the arts; and a partial melioration of manners, tending more to embellish the superior rank of society, than to improve the situation of all mankind."²⁸ In a posthumously published essay "On Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature" (1797) Wollstonecraft equates "civilization" with "luxury" and "artificial pleasures" and opposes it with feelings akin to nature:

. . . when civilization, or rather luxury, has made considerable advances--those calm sensations are not sufficiently lively to serve as a relaxation to the voluptuary, or even to the

²⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman ed. Miriam Brody, (London: Penguin Books, 1975) 151.

²⁷ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 521.

²⁸ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 223.

moderate pursuer of artificial pleasures. In the present state of society, the understanding must bring back the feelings to nature. . . .²⁹

Yet, Wollstonecraft's allegiance to the economic interests of her class would not allow her to negate civilization totally. While admitting that civilization can be morally destructive, she could not help identifying herself, at the same time, with civilization itself. That explains why in numerous places in her works "civilization" has the positive meaning of cultural progress as opposed to barbarism and rusticity. While she is praising the simplicity of the manners of the peasants in Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft never hesitates to indicate her preference for a "more civilized world," as she confesses in her letters from Scandinavia: "The more I see of the world, the more I am convinced that civilization is a blessing not sufficiently estimated by those who have not traced its progress."³⁰ This inconsistency reveals, to a certain degree, Wollstonecraft's ambivalent views on luxury.

Wollstonecraft was not alone in this dilemma. John Thelwall, the most important writer to be linked to the first working-class political reform association--the London

²⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman ed. William Godwin, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798) 2: 174.

³⁰ Wollstonecraft, Letters 20.

Corresponding Society--had a similar attitude. On the one hand, he counselled "a love of virtuous poverty" as among the "indispensable requisites of character for a people," and railed against the tinsel ornaments and ridiculous superfluities which enfeeble people's minds, and produce voluptuous diseases in the affluent. On the other hand, he confessed that he loved "the splendour of arts, and the refinements both of science and innocent luxury."³¹

Historically speaking, according to Claeys, Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries' ambivalent feeling towards civilization anticipates the Owenite idealists' attempt "to combine the goals of universal culture, material affluence with reduced hours of labour and no harmful division of labour, and community of property."³² The Victorian thinker John Stuart Mill was led to probe the pros and cons of civilization. Mill says,

We are accustomed to call a country more civilized if we think it more improved; more eminent in the best characteristics of Man and Society: farther advanced in the road to perfection; happier, nobler, wiser. This is one sense of the word civilization. But in another sense it stands for that kind of improvement only, which distinguishes

³¹ Claeys 29.

³² Claeys 32.

a wealthy and powerful nation from savages or barbarians. It is in this sense that we may speak of the vices or the miseries of civilization; and that the question has been seriously propounded, whether civilization is on the whole a good or an evil?³³

Even twentieth-century philosophers were inspired to explore the dialectical nature of civilization and barbarism.

Walter Benjamin observes in Illuminations:

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible.³⁴

Utopianism is closely connected with the attack on luxury in the eighteenth century. Unlike Sarah Scott, Wollstonecraft was not an advocate of a female Utopia. As I have mentioned above, she thought the institution of the nunnery only nurtured selfishness and narrow-mindedness. Yet

³³ John Stuart Mill, Dissertations and Discussions (London: George Routledge & Sons Limited) 130. n.d.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, Illuminations: Theses on the Philosophy of History trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 256-7.

she did have some utopian ideas regarding the future. Claire Tomalin in The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (1974) mentions that Wollstonecraft shared utopian dreams with François-Noël Babeuf, a French surveyor who advocated common ownership of land and other measures to raise the countryside above its misery. They seemed to foresee the disappearance of urban life and the spread of small farms and villages all over the land.³⁵ In A Vindication of the Rights of Men Wollstonecraft pictures a utopian society in which the large estates in England are redistributed, and harmony and social equality are achieved as a consequence.³⁶ Also, in The Emigrants, a novel traditionally ascribed to her lover Imlay but, as Robert Hare contends, more probably written by Wollstonecraft, there is a detailed description of a utopian model society near Louisville, Kentucky.³⁷ Later, in her Letters, Wollstonecraft praises the Norwegian

³⁵ Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974) 136.

³⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Men," A Wollstonecraft Anthology ed. J. Todd (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977) 81.

³⁷ Robert Hare, introduction, The Emigrants, by Gilbert Imlay (Dublin: 1794, Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1964) xiii-xiv. The description of the utopian community in Kentucky can be found on p. 295. I am indebted to David McNeil for this piece of information.

system of dividing landed estates into small farms³⁸ which, in effect, helps prove the feasibility of her earlier utopian proposal. However, these utopian dreams can only be viewed as symptomatic of her nostalgic yearning for a past economic order and her attempt to re-establish women's role in active economic production, rather than the sign of any serious plan for a truly egalitarian society based on an agrarian economy. A consideration of Wollstonecraft's attitude towards class shows that she was not a believer in utopian possibilities.

2. Wollstonecraft's views on class and class relationships as related to luxury

Eighteenth-century attitudes towards luxury are related to class prejudice, and Wollstonecraft's attitude towards class distinction constitutes an important part of her views on luxury. Critics have dealt with this incidentally, as relevant to other concerns. Even these incidental comments tend to distort Wollstonecraft's views, however. For example, Mary Poovey maintains that,

Instead of systematically castigating tyrants, she [Wollstonecraft] heaps scorn on those who submit. . . . she is allying herself with the individualistic values of middle-class men and

³⁸ Wollstonecraft, Letters 61.

heaping scorn on the posture of helplessness,
which she can see only as weakness and personal
failure.³⁹

Poovey's comment on Wollstonecraft's class attitude is unfair and reductive. Wollstonecraft's attitudes towards class can be seen as an embodiment of the dialectics of her bourgeois class. A bourgeois economic system supports liberal individualism and negates the hierarchy inherent in feudal aristocratic society. John Locke, arguably a spokesman for bourgeois individualism, for example, supposed that the earth to have been originally given to all in common and that land was naturally left to "the industrious and rational" to cultivate and appropriate. But, at the same time, the bourgeoisie also attempts to maintain its economic dominance and later, when it comes to power, its institutions. Lukács observes: "Politically, it became evident when at the moment of victory, the 'freedom' in whose name the bourgeoisie had joined battle with feudalism, was transformed into a new repressiveness."⁴⁰ Being a member of the bourgeoisie by birth and breeding, Wollstonecraft constantly veered between narrow class assumptions and bourgeois democratic humanism in her

³⁹ Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 63.

⁴⁰ Lukács 61.

attitudes towards class.

Eighteenth-century English society was a highly class-conscious one. Generally speaking, the century's intellectuals accepted the existing class division and class subordination without question. As I mentioned in Chapter I, both Defoe and Henry Fielding were concerned about the lower class not knowing their place and imitating their superiors. Richard Price (1723-91), the dissenting minister whom Wollstonecraft most revered, was known to be "indignant that the lower classes were beginning to use refined sugar in their tea."⁴¹ Eighteenth-century middle-class female writers adopted their male counterparts' opinions. Both Eliza Haywood's A Present for a Servant Maid (1743) and Sarah Trimmer's The Servant's Friend (1801) provide detailed instruction to servant maids with the intention of indoctrinating the servant-class with the idea of subordination. Wollstonecraft's contemporary Hannah More lectures in Cheap Repository Tracts on the importance of the poor keeping their own places and not imitating the rich. Class hierarchy was respected and taken for granted by these writers.

Wollstonecraft's attitude towards the upper-class was consistent throughout all her works. Partly because of her own unhappy experience of working as companion and governess

⁴¹ Emily W. Sunstein, A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 19.

in English upper-class families, Wollstonecraft was disgusted by the luxury and moral depravity she witnessed. In letters to Everina (Wollstonecraft's sister), she condemns the frivolity and luxury of the Anglo-Irish upper class, to which her employer, Lady Kingsborough, belongs. Also, as I shall show in the following discussion, in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary and The Wrongs of Woman Wollstonecraft attacks, in numerous places, the debauched and idle life of the upper class.

But Wollstonecraft's attitude towards the lower class was always ambivalent, or, to use Lukács's terminology, dialectical. As a member of the middle class, Wollstonecraft more or less inherited the prejudice against the lower class. In her early work Original Stories (1787) she is snobbishly class-conscious, saying that children of wealthy families would catch the ignorance and prejudice of the lower-class if left entirely to the management of servants.⁴² In Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1786), Wollstonecraft more than once warns against the harmful influence of servants on children; she says that the first notions children imbibe from servants are mean and vulgar, they are taught cunning, the wisdom of that class of

⁴² Mary Wollstonecraft, Original Stories from Real Life, with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness (1787, London: Henry Frowde, 1906) xx.

people.⁴³ Later, she repeatedly advises mothers not to entrust their children to the care of servants because of the "danger of corruptions." A woman's duty is, Wollstonecraft asserts, in a great part, management of servants, because they are "in general, ignorant and cunning."⁴⁴

While condemning and despising the lower class for immorality and ignorance in Original Stories, Wollstonecraft could not help voicing, though a little condescendingly, the egalitarian democratic ideas which began to emerge at that time and develop later: "we are creatures of the same nature, and I may be their inferior in those graces which should adorn my soul, and render me truly great."⁴⁵ As A. L. Morton and George Tate point out, the effect of the French Revolution was decisive for the ruling classes (the aristocracy, gentry and commercial class) in ending internal feuds and closing the ranks.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, the democratic tendency in Wollstonecraft's class-consciousness

⁴³ Mary Wollstonecraft, Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life (London: Joseph Johnson, 1787) 13-4.

⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft, Thoughts 118-23.

⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 52.

⁴⁶ A. L. Morton and George Tate, The British Labor Movement 1770-1920: a Political History (New York: International Publishers Inc., 1957) 21.

became more predominant after the French Revolution. In The Rights of Men she refutes Edmund Burke's doctrine of class-subordination with vehemence by pointing out that the liberty of the honest poor is often sacrificed to secure the property of the rich: "Security of property!. . . And to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed."⁴⁷ Later, in Letters Wollstonecraft protests against the inhumane treatment the servants received in Sweden, as well as the situation of the English servants.⁴⁸ Instead of suggesting that servants should be disciplined as she does in Thoughts, Wollstonecraft modulates her tone by saying that one must love his/her servants. Contrary to her earlier assertion that servants are born cunning, she argues that it is difficult for them to remain honest if they are not to partake of the dainties which they prepare.

The democratic radicalism in Wollstonecraft's class-consciousness can be seen in her attitude towards two prominent features of eighteenth-century bourgeois ethics: industry and charity. The eighteenth-century bourgeois belief was that industry constituted a determining factor in one's material prosperity. Kurt Samuelsson in Religion and Economic Action points out that,

The doctrine of diligence and thrift that was

⁴⁷ Wollstonecraft, Anthology 65-8.

⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft Letters 26.

preached to mankind for three centuries--roughly the 16th, 17th and 18th--was not unique to Protestantism, Calvinism and the free religious sects. It constituted a most important feature of the moral outlook of mercantilism, which everywhere reigned supreme . . . Idleness and luxury were the great vices. Scarcely a single mercantilist writer or politician failed to emphasise the point.⁴⁹

Eighteenth-century female writers such as Sarah Scott and Hannah More spared no pains in moralizing on industrious action.⁵⁰ Wollstonecraft herself, however, remained different. In Original Stories she has not yet formed her theory of class exploitation, but she illustrates clearly that the suffering poor are not necessarily lazy. Both Robin and his wife, a dairy-maid, are very industrious, but misfortunes befall them. Later, in The Wrongs of Woman the lower-class heroine, Jemima, exposes the fallacy of the theory that "every person willing to work may find employment," by pointing out that the lower-class suffers

⁴⁹ Kurt Samuelsson, Religion and Economic Action trans. E. Geoffrey French (Stockholm: William Heinemann Ltd. 1957) 81.

⁵⁰ Hogarth praises industry and satirizes idleness in his "Industry and Idleness" series.

because of the unjust distribution of social wealth. Jemima also observes that women of the lower-class suffer all the more because of sexual inequality: "A man with half her industry and ability could easily procure a decent livelihood while she was cast aside as the filth of society."⁵¹ Here Wollstonecraft attempts, as she does in A Vindication, to make the connection between gender and class, or, to use Zillah Eisenstein's term, between sexual class and economic class,⁵² by pointing out that women doubly suffered in a male hierarchical social system.

In the eighteenth century the theory of class subordination was related to the theory of Christian charity, though the latter had been extrapolated theoretically first by Thomas Aquinas (1224-74). For Aquinas the possession of private property carried with it certain duties dictated by God's design. The theory itself can be seen as a compromise between the divine injunction to live in a perfect condition of community of property and the conventionally recognized desire for private possessions.⁵³ In the eighteenth century this theory became conventional. Louis Landa observes,

⁵¹ Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman 114-6.

⁵² Zillah Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism (New York & London: Longman, 1981) *passim*.

⁵³ Claeys 6.

The theory of the stewardship of the wealthy . . . was an essential aspect of the Christian theory of charity as it had developed from the Middle Ages. By the eighteenth century it was indeed a hoary conventionality. . . .

The theory of the stewardship of wealth . . . permitted wealth to be viewed as in itself morally neutral--gave to it a social purpose which justified its existence. . . it made room for the amelioration without in any respect suggesting that fundamental social changes were necessary in the rigid structure of society.⁵⁴

Wollstonecraft could not totally break away from her middle-class notion of private property, yet she was also aware of the injustice involved in wealth distribution. Therefore her views on charity developed in a dialectical fashion. On the one hand, she could not depart from the bourgeois humanitarianism which the intellectuals of her age zealously advocated. In her earlier work Original Stories Wollstonecraft does advise, as her contemporary charity school movement advocate Hannah More does, that ". . .the

⁵⁴ Louis Landa, "Jonathan Swift and Charity," Essays in Eighteenth-Century English Literature (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980) 59-61.

greatest pleasure. . . has arisen from the habitual exercise of charity, in its various branches. . . ."55 On the other hand, as a democratic idealist she is compelled to point out the inadequacy of this theory. Her mouthpiece, Mrs. Mason, makes the comment that poor people are entitled to the spoils of the rich, not through charity, but by right: "The poor who are willing to work, had a right to the comforts of life."56 In The Rights of Men Wollstonecraft further argues that nature authorizes and reason sanctions the right people to enjoy the acquisitions which they have earned through talent and industry.57 Charity, she maintains, implies favour, not justice; yet the poor deserve justice in the distribution of wealth in society.58 She uses the voice of Darnford, a character in her last work The Wrongs of Woman, to attack the middle-class's self-congratulatory charity: "Till the rich will give more than a part of their wealth, till they will give time and attention to the wants of the distressed, never let them boast of charity."59 For her

55 Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 71.

56 Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 32.

57 Wollstonecraft, Anthology 71.

58 Wollstonecraft, Anthology 79.

59 Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Women 119.

time Wollstonecraft was clearly far more advanced in socialist thinking than most of her contemporary female writers.

Wollstonecraft's dialectical class-consciousness extends itself to her attitude towards the system of property distribution and its consequence--class distinction. Her age saw the dawning of socialism as represented by Godwin and William Cobbett, who were in favor of abolishing private property (by the way, it should be pointed out that Godwin changed his ideas about the property system considerably in his two editions of Political Justice). Wollstonecraft was radical enough to question the legitimacy of the existing property system. In The Rights of Men she asserts that "the demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of men. . . and to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed."⁶⁰ As I have mentioned above, in the same pamphlet she made some utopian proposals. Yet the interests of her own class would not allow her to explore this egalitarian possibility fully. It is the convention of primogeniture and not the private property system that she opposes. What she advocates in The Rights of Men is the redistribution of

⁶⁰ Wollstonecraft, Anthology 65-8.

property rather than the elimination of it.⁶¹ She could not, however, confute the middle-class apologia for the private property system, as voiced by Richard Cumberland, John Locke, Francis Hutcheson and Joseph Priestley, to name but a few. Hence her views on charity, class equality and whether the poor can enjoy luxury are ambivalent.

Ironically, in her vision of an ideal society in A Vindication the servant-class still exists for the convenience of middle-class women: "I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station with perhaps merely a servant-maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business."⁶² Moreover, in Wollstonecraft's scheme for education, there should still be a school providing special training for servants while children of "superior abilities, or fortunes," should be sent to another school.⁶³ Here Wollstonecraft sounds exactly like the conservative writers of her century such as James Talbott, Thomas Mangey, Edmund Gibson, and even Jonathan Swift, who asserted that poor

⁶¹ Wollstonecraft, Anthology 71.

⁶² Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 254-5.

⁶³ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 287.

children should not be educated above their station.⁶⁴

The dual role of Wollstonecraft as a radical democratic thinker and as a spokeswoman for her bourgeois class makes the internal dialectical contradictions in her works both inevitable and irreconcilable. The democratic tendency, however, becomes more evident in the works of her later years. In Letters Wollstonecraft makes it clear that she is already aware that the higher level of civilization is unattainable if class distinctions exist.⁶⁵ In her last work, The Wrongs of Woman, the lower-class woman character, Jemima, is portrayed as having more independence, strength of character, and initiative than Maria, the middle-class heroine.⁶⁶ At the end of the novel, Jemima even acts symbolically as Maria's saviour: "With supernatural force she [Maria] broke from him [the "sepulchral being" who tries to grasp her], and, throwing her arms round Jemima, cried, 'Save me!'. . . They were out of his reach."⁶⁷ However, Jemima's role as a potential liberating force is

⁶⁴ Landa 57.

⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft, Letters 197.

⁶⁶ Gary Kelly points out: "Maria represents woman of the class on the border between the middle class and the gentry." Gary Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830 (London and New York: Longman, 1989) 38.

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman 190.

understandably vague in the novel. The Wrongs of Woman was written in 1796. It was not until the earlier part of the nineteenth century that the machine industry in England was to develop and the proletariat as a social class would become an integral part of the capitalist system. Only then would democratic socialism, evident in such contexts as Owenism, for instance, reach a political level that Wollstonecraft herself might have arrived at, had she lived longer.

3. Wollstonecraft's views on trade and commerce

As the controversy about luxury in eighteenth-century England is a consequence of the development of trade and commerce, eighteenth-century writers' arguments on luxury usually center on the issue of whether commerce is beneficial to humankind. Wollstonecraft's attitude towards commerce is dialectical, if not unbiased. Of course, she was prejudiced in her view partly because her lover Imlay was a businessman and he, to her utmost resentment, constantly used business as an excuse for his absence from her company. More than once in her letters to Imlay she protests against his involvement in commerce, calling it an activity of "ignoble pursuits."⁶⁸ However, it is hard to say how much this biographical factor accounts for her

⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft, Letters 187.

hatred of commerce, because Wollstonecraft certainly could not have deceived herself so much as to believe that commercial business was the real reason that kept Imlay away from her. Rather, her aversion to commerce can be related to her nostalgic yearning for an outmoded self-sufficient economy which was directly related to female economic independence. Like Rousseau, who criticized commerce and the bourgeois market in "Considerations on the Government of Poland,"⁶⁹ Wollstonecraft was also against commerce and the market; as she points out in Letters, "little can be advanced in favour of a pursuit (commerce) that wears out the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude."⁷⁰

Wollstonecraft's detestation of commerce can also be seen in her negative description of the city--the hub of commercial capitalism. Raymond Williams argues in The Country and the City that Engels was among the first to see the modern city as a social and physical consequence of capitalism,⁷¹ and that eighteenth-century writers only

⁶⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Considerations on the Government of Poland," Political Writings ed. F. M. Watkins (London: Nelson and Sons, 1953).

⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft, Letters 119-20.

⁷¹ Raymond Williams, The Country and The City (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd. 1973) 364.

associated the city with wealth and luxury.⁷² In fact, however, much earlier than Engels, Wollstonecraft viewed the city as an unnatural product of both commercial and industrial capitalism. In Mary the heroine is appalled by the vice and depravity that London, a commercial centre, represents: "She saw vulgarity, dirt, and vice--her soul sickened . . . forgetting her own griefs, she gave the world a much indebted tear; mourned for a world in ruins."⁷³ Later, in her Letters the city of Christiania (Oslo) is described as ". . . without grandeur or elegance," and as having "an emphatical stamp of meanness, of poverty of conception, which only a commercial spirit could give."⁷⁴ Her impression of Hamburg and the Hamburger [no pun intended!] can be read, similarly, as a condemnation of commercial capitalism:

Hamburg is an ill, close-built town . . . the character of the man is lost in the Hamburger . . . Immense fortunes have been acquired by the secret manoeuvres of trade . . . men entirely devoted to commerce never acquire or lose, all taste and greatness of mind. An

⁷² Williams 348.

⁷³ Wollstonecraft, Mary 48-9.

⁷⁴ Wollstonecraft, Letters 125.

ostentatious display of wealth without elegance, and a greedy enjoyment of pleasure without sentiment, embrutes them.⁷⁵

(emphasis added)

The phrases that Wollstonecraft uses to describe these three commercial cities--London, Oslo, Hamburg--are very much the same: "soulless", "a world in ruins", "meanness", "embrutes". They imply the alienating effect of commercial capitalism on human beings, later to be discussed in detail by Karl Marx.⁷⁶ Wollstonecraft's view of the city as an impersonal dehumanizing commercial machine also anticipates numerous writers after her. Dickens, for example, dramatizes the brutalization of man by urban commerce in his works, such as Little Dorrit and Dombey and Son. Thomas Carlyle's "Gospel of Mammonism" in Past and Present (1843) elaborates Wollstonecraft's idea that the cash-payment relationship in a commercial society can be detrimental to human beings.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Wollstonecraft, Letters 185-7.

⁷⁶ Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959) 73.

⁷⁷ True, it must be owned, we for the present, with our Mammon-Gospel, have come to strange conclusions. We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human

In her arguments against commerce Wollstonecraft emphasizes that commerce leads to class-diversification and a harmful division of labour:

The destructive influence of commerce, it is true, carried on by men who are eager by overgrown riches to partake of the respect paid to nobility, is felt in a variety of ways. The most pernicious, perhaps, is its producing an aristocracy of wealth, which degrades mankind, by making them only exchange savageness for tame servility, instead of acquiring the urbanity of improved reason. Commerce also, overstocking a country with people, obliges the majority to become manufacturers rather than husbandmen, and then the division of labour, solely to enrich the proprietor, renders the mind entirely inactive.⁷⁸

This argument echoes very well Wollstonecraft's earlier presentation of an agrarian utopian society in The Rights of Men discussed above. It shou'd be noted that Godwin thought commerce and manufacture should be restricted as much as possible. To him the division of labour was "the offspring

beings; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all engagements of man. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (1843, London: Everyman's Library, 1960) 141.

⁷⁸ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 518-9.

of avarice."⁷⁹ Sir James Steuart in his Works Political, Metaphysical, and Chronological praises the Spartan constitution for its insistence on no division of labour, no trade and consequently no luxury.⁸⁰ Most notably, Robert Owen renounces the manufacturing system for its destructive moral effect and argues that it should not take precedence over agriculture.⁸¹ So Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the primacy of land and her anti-labour-division attitude are deeply rooted in a mixture of radical democratism and conservatism.

However, as the financial interest of her class is inseparably linked with the new bourgeois marketplace, Wollstonecraft could not fail to acknowledge the beneficial effects of commerce; she noted that England and America owe their liberty to commerce, which created a new species of power to undermine the feudal system.⁸² The same ambivalence in her feelings is also expressed in A

⁷⁹ William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice ed. Issac Kramnick (1793, Harmondsworth: 1976) 751-2.

⁸⁰ Sir James Steurt, Works Political, Metaphysical, and Chronological ed. Sir James Steuart the younger (London: 1805) 341.

⁸¹ Robert Owen, An Address to the Master-Manufacturers of Great Britain, on the Present Existing Evils of the Manufacturing System (Bolton: 1819).

⁸² Wollstonecraft, Letters 129.

Historical and Moral View. On one hand, she condemns the destructive moral effect of commerce; on the other, she has to admit that commerce could lead to the prosperity of the national economy: "the unshackling of commerce is the only secret to render it [the economy] flourishing, and answer more effectually the ends for which it is politically necessary."⁸³ Wollstonecraft's inability to work out a coherent economic theory is indicative of the internal contradictions in the system of her class.⁸⁴

4. Wollstonecraft's views on sexual mores and female education

As mentioned in chapter I, in eighteenth-century Europe, the concept of luxury was closely related to that of lust. The discussion of Wollstonecraft's attitude towards luxury unavoidably leads us to an examination of the sexual mores in her work.

As with her attitude towards the other aspects of luxury, there is a dialectical structure inherent in her views on sexuality. As a member of the bourgeois class

⁸³ Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 499.

⁸⁴ The bourgeoisie must either consciously ignore insights which become increasingly urgent or else they must suppress their own moral instincts in order to be able to support with a good conscience an economic system that serves only their own interests.

(Lukács 66.)

whose economic system necessitated stability in marriage and consequently, strict sexual mores,⁸⁵ Wollstonecraft had to adhere, even only theoretically, to a Puritan sexual/moral standard. This stance is most evident in her earlier works. For example, in Original Stories she emphasizes the harm of "thinking much of gratifying one's appetites," and asserts that "those who think much of gratifying their appetites, will at last act meanly in order to indulge them."⁸⁶ Even in her A Vindication, the reputedly "feminist" manifesto, in spite of the fact that Wollstonecraft ridicules the traditional notion of female chastity ("When Richardson makes Clarissa tell Lovelace that he had robbed her of her honour, he must have had strange notions of honour and virtue"⁸⁷), she still depreciates sexuality, in suggesting that husband and wife should "love each other without passion": "In order to fulfil the duties of life . . . a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of

⁸⁵ "To the bourgeois, domesticity or life in the home with his family had greater emotional significance than it did for the nobility." Elinor Barber, The Bourgeoisie in Eighteenth-Century France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959) 79.

⁸⁶ Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 39.

⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 166.

society."⁸⁸ Coincidentally, although at that time she loved Henry Fuseli, she only proposed to live with him and his wife Sophia on a Platonic basis. She wrote to Fuseli: "If I thought my passion criminal, I would conquer it or die in the attempt."⁸⁹ Nowhere in her works did Wollstonecraft ever condone sexual promiscuity.

Jane Spencer argues in The Rise of the Woman Novelist that it was after losing her social respectability through her affair with Imlay, who deserted her, and her liaison with Godwin, whom she married when she became pregnant, that Wollstonecraft was able to develop a revolutionary view of sexuality.⁹⁰ This biographical factor is worth taking into account. So is the influence of Diderot's "joyeuseté de philosophe" on Wollstonecraft during her sojourn in France.⁹¹ But more importantly, I feel that

⁸⁸ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 114.

⁸⁹ Edna Nixon, Mary Wollstonecraft, Her Life and Times (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1971) 78.

⁹⁰ Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 133.

⁹¹ Perhaps during Wollstonecraft's sojourn in France, the 'joyeuseté de philosophe' of Diderot had the greatest impact on the formation of her revolutionary view towards sexuality in woman. Claire Tomalin, her biographer, records:

Diderot's attack on traditional Christian attitudes to sexual behaviour in his "Supplement au voyage de Bougainville" suggested an approach to sex involving nothing but simple enjoyment; the value

Wollstonecraft's view of sexuality should be placed in the context of her dialectical ideology and should not be regarded as an isolated incidence. The paradox of capitalist mores is that, on one hand, the capitalist mode of production necessitates the stability of marriage and family. As a consequence, it encourages strict, if only double-standard sexual virtue. On the other, the capitalist economic system necessitates liberal individualism, which leads to sexual freedom and liberal feminism.

Wollstonecraft's work embodies this paradox. In The Wrongs of Woman, the two women characters representing the positive values in the book are Maria and Jemima; the former finally becomes involved in an illicit sexual relationship with Darnford and the latter is a raped woman who has also been sexually exploited by men in many ways. Both are impure, according to the sexual norms of Wollstonecraft's society.⁹² Maria declares her contempt for the society's traditional concept that a woman should be without 'passion' (sexual

of chastity and the institution of marriage were both brought into question by the philosopher . . . in France she (Wollstonecraft) began to learn an attitude closer to Diderot's. Von Schlabrendorf reported an exchange between her and a Frenchwoman who boasted of her complete lack of sexual desire: "Pour moi, je n'ai pas de tempérament (tempérament means libido or sexual appetite). To which Mary answered at once, 'Tant pis pour vous, madame, c'est un défaut de la nature.' (Tomalin 131-2.)

⁹² See Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period 40.

desire). Wollstonecraft's defiance of the traditional sexual morality and her defence of woman's right to sexual fulfilment are a reaction to patriarchal dominance in gender relations and an affirmation of liberal individualism.

Lust in men, however, is strongly condemned by Wollstonecraft. Severe criticism in The Wrongs of Woman is directed at men's sexual exploitation of women. Both Maria and Jemima suffer constantly from sexual harassment and exploitation. Maria's husband attempts to use her as a sexual tool to advance his fortune. Because of her lower social position, Jemima is raped, and subsequently forced to support herself by prostitution.

Wollstonecraft's revolutionary view of women's right to fulfil their sexuality and her condemnation of the male sexual exploitation of women had tremendous impact on the Owenites. Robert Owen, in all his major pronouncements on social policy, such as The Book of the New Moral World, denounces the bourgeois marriage system and the consequent conjugal relationships. But like Wollstonecraft, who remained to some degree affirmative of the bourgeois sexual moral codes, the Owenite feminists also "drew an austere line between liberty and licence."⁹³ Shelley, Owen and other Owenites all celebrate the liberated libido in women as against the bourgeois sexual ideology, but their thinking

⁹³ Taylor 148.

does not imply casualness in sexual matters.⁹⁴ However, it is interesting to note that Wollstonecraft did contradict herself by acting contrary to her theory. In spite of her indignation at women being treated as men's sexual objects, she nevertheless implored Imlay, who had abandoned her for another young actress, to let her live together with him and his new mistress.⁹⁵

Luxury in women, namely, indulgence in things ornamental, was always a subject of concern to Wollstonecraft. In Original Stories Mrs. Mason, Wollstonecraft's mouth-piece, advises young girls not to desire to excel in trifles, for, when the main pursuit is trivial, the character will of course become insignificant.⁹⁶ In Thoughts Wollstonecraft devotes a whole chapter to dress and cosmetics and emphasizes the importance of being dressed simply:

Dress ought to adorn the person, and not rival it. It may be simple, elegant, and becoming, without being expensive; and ridiculous fashions disregarded, while singularity is avoided. . . .

⁹⁴ Taylor 44-5.

⁹⁵ Nixon 194.

⁹⁶ Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 49.

In the article of dress may be included the whole tribe of beauty-washes . . . A made-up face may strike visitors, but will certainly disgust domestic friends . . . Simplicity of dress, and unaffected manners, should go together. They demand respect.⁹⁷

Wollstonecraft not only despises luxurious dress and ornaments but also extends her condemnation to the fetishistic obsession with exterior appearance. In the allegorical stories of Lady Sly and Mrs. Trueman (Original Stories) she maintains that it is "the foolish people who take great pains to decorate the outside of their houses."⁹⁸ This idea of Wollstonecraft's could be seen, however, in the context of her contemporary theories of moral economy. Rousseau, for example, makes the connection between honesty and nakedness in his Social Contract.⁹⁹ William Godwin regarded the manufacture of "trinkets and luxuries" as the

⁹⁷ Wollstonecraft, Thoughts 36-41.

⁹⁸ Wollstonecraft, Original Stories 28.

⁹⁹ External ornaments are no less foreign to virtue, which is the strength and activity of the mind. The honest man is an athlete, who loves to wrestle stark naked; he scorns all those vile trappings, which prevent the exertion of his strength, and were, for the most part, invented only to conceal some deformity.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract and Discourses trans. G. D. H. Cole (London: Dent & Dutton, 1963) 121-2.

least essential use of human labor; the desire for ornaments leads to the "exhibition of wealth," and hence to a false system of values.¹⁰⁰ Adam Smith, while admitting that the obsession with ornaments encouraged the recirculation of wealth, thought that only "the most childish vanity" and "base and selfish disposition" could lead one to display the "frivolous objects, the little ornaments of dress and furniture, jewels, trinkets, gewgaws."¹⁰¹

Wollstonecraft surely was not the only eighteenth-century writer to examine luxury in women, but there is a fundamental difference between her views and those of male writers of the same period. While Pope in "The Rape of the Lock" and Swift in Gulliver's Travels describe women as by nature frivolous and fond of luxury, as I mentioned in my Introduction, Wollstonecraft argues that it is the pressure of a male-dominant society and the lack of adequate education that make women vulnerable to the temptation of luxury.

It is a known fact that Catharine Macaulay's Letters on Education (1790), which assert that women were made (by

¹⁰⁰ William Godwin, Enquiry concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness ed. F. E. L. Priestley, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946) 2: 482.

¹⁰¹ Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations eds. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 106.

their environment), not born, influenced Wollstonecraft. Indeed, in her later works Wollstonecraft emphasizes the determining influence of circumstances on female behaviour. For example, in A Historical and Moral View, while discussing the debauchery of Marie Antoinette, Wollstonecraft observes that the French queen was corrupted by the voluptuous atmosphere and the profligacy of Louis XVI's court from which she could not escape.¹⁰² In A Vindication Wollstonecraft points out that because women are treated as men's sexual objects, they have to adorn themselves, and consequently become preoccupied with trivialities. Luxury in women is actually a means to obtain power which they cannot otherwise acquire.¹⁰³ If women were not the sexual objects of men, they would have the right notion of beauty and female excellence.¹⁰⁴ She also points out that women are deliberately denied access to adequate education because, once they are educated, men would lose their superiority as well as "gross enjoyment,"¹⁰⁵ a vision that was relatively radical in her time.

Although Wollstonecraft saw the connection between

¹⁰² Wollstonecraft, A Historical and Moral View 33-4.

¹⁰³ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 145, 257.

¹⁰⁴ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 126.

¹⁰⁵ Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Women 146-7.

female education and luxury, her vision was very much hampered by her stance as a liberal bourgeois feminist unwilling to depart from the political interests of her own class. It is true that she had absorbed the bourgeois value of liberal individualism and had extended it to women (something Rousseau never did). She asserted that only by being independent could women cease to be sexual objects and consequently cease to be merely decorative. To enhance this argument, she proposes in A Vindication various new roles for women to make them useful members of society as physicians, nurses, midwives, politicians and businesswomen.¹⁰⁶ Yet, as Lukács observes, "the ideological history of the bourgeoisie was nothing but a desperate resistance to every insight into the true nature of the society it had created and thus to a real understanding of its class situation."¹⁰⁷ Capitalism, especially the early capitalism in the eighteenth century, was marked by the support of the patriarchal system, if only politically. Not only, as I have mentioned above, did the bourgeoisie place higher value on the stability of family than the aristocracy did, but also the emerging industrial capitalist mode of production necessitated the separation of home and workplace, of private and public space, and hence of women's

¹⁰⁶ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 260-1.

¹⁰⁷ Lukács 66.

confined role within the domestic space. Wollstonecraft was never able to transcend the capitalist patriarchal view regarding women.

Although she scorns the notion of women being the sexual objects of men, her vision of women is still limited to their role as dutiful wife and mother: "To prepare a woman to fulfil the important duties of a wife and mother, are certainly the objects that should be in view during the early period of life."¹⁰⁸ Even in A Vindication the picture Wollstonecraft has in mind is only the following:

I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station. . . . I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who, returning weary home in the evening, found smiling babes and a clean hearth.¹⁰⁹

Obviously, in this ideal picture the man is the financial provider and the woman is still economically dependent, happy with her lot as home-maker. Wollstonecraft seems quite unable to harmonize her theoretically radical postulation and her notion of women's role generated from class interest (even though subconsciously). This

¹⁰⁸ Wollstonecraft, Thoughts 58.

¹⁰⁹ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 254-5.

ideological contradiction impedes Wollstonecraft's further exploration into the possibility of female education. In spite of the various professions she suggests for women,¹¹⁰ her argument about the importance of women's education is still very much in the "bluestocking" tradition:

Reading, and such arts as have been already mentioned, would fill up the time, and prevent a young person's being lost in dissipation, which enervates the mind, and often leads to improper connections. . . .

A mind accustomed to observe can never be quite idle, and will catch improvement on all occasions. Our pursuits and pleasures should have the same tendency, and every thing concur to prepare us for a state of purity and happiness. There vice and folly will not poison our pleasures; our faculties will expand.¹¹¹

These remarks are similar to those offered by the conservative advocates of female education mentioned in my previous chapters.

Wollstonecraft did point out, though, that women's financial independence could not be achieved unless there was radical social reform regarding employment equity, an

¹¹⁰ Wollstonecraft, A Vindication 216.

¹¹¹ Wollstonecraft, Thoughts 46, 160.

insight that her preceding and contemporary female education advocates did not have. Jemima in The Wrongs of Women angrily refutes the myth that every person willing to work may find employment; a man with half her ability could easily find a job with higher pay but she could not. Her words suggest that, in Wollstonecraft's view, the future of women's independence lay in the reform of the social system. In this respect she is far more progressive than Sarah Scott, who can only see women's liberation realized in an isolated and artificial utopian society. Wollstonecraft's embryonic idea that women's independence is a part of a social revolution does have some historical significance. Not many years later in England, the female Owenites strongly identified themselves with the working-class.¹¹² About a century later, Frederick Engels, the co-founder of Marxism, in his Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State presents the thesis that women's liberation is dependent on women's full participation in social production, realizable only upon the abolition of private ownership.¹¹³ Wollstonecraft's ideas on the connection between gender and class certainly deserve our attention.

Wollstonecraft's views on luxury and female

¹¹² Taylor 73.

¹¹³ Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York: International Publishers, 1972)

education are inconsistent and even contradictory, because they stem from an ideology which constantly defeats itself. They are interesting, however, because they link Wollstonecraft's contemporary world with the new world she heralded. Moreover, they deserve attention as intellectual records of a bourgeois woman during the transitional period of rising industrial capitalism--a woman who tried to identify her role and to seek remedies for a morally decaying society while protecting the interests of her class.

Chapter IV Luxury and Utilitarianism: A

Reinterpretation of Hannah More's Works

It is useful to examine Hannah More's views on luxury after my discussion on Wollstonecraft, since it is a critical commonplace to regard them as two opponents. Criticisms of Hannah More tend to range between two extremes. First, the biographers from the beginning of this century well into the fifties (such as Mary Alden Hopkins, M. G. Jones and Annette Meakin) describe her as a loyal Tory defender, a resuscitator of lost Puritan values, and an evangelical saint among the British upper-middle class intelligentsia.¹ Then there are social historians like Lawrence Stone who consider More as one of "the defenders of eighteenth-century values (who) fought a brave but losing battle against the new trend [democracy]." ² However, the More critics in the seventies and the eighties unhesitatingly label her as a social revolutionary.³ For

¹ See Annette M. B. Meakin, Hannah More: A Biographical Study (London: Smith, Elder Co., 1911), Mary Alden Hopkins, Hannah More and Her Circle (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947) and Mary G. Jones, Hannah More (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

² Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 668.

³ Although most of the criticism that concentrates on the revolutionary aspect of Hannah More appears in the 1970s and 1980s, Ray Strachey did make the observation in 1928 that ". . . devout women like More and Sarah Trimmer who mapped

example, Gerald Newman argues that More and other polemicists did "much more indeed to subvert the established order than to uphold it."⁴ Mitzi Myers contends that More preached a militantly moral middle-class reform and that she and Wollstonecraft have much in common despite the partisan political differences between them.⁵ Of course, in spite of the Puritan values she preached, More herself was a woman of the world; had connections with the fashionable members of London society; enjoyed a very good relationship with David Garrick; and, most remarkably, was a bosom friend of Horace Walpole who was a known libertine.

The discrepancy between More's personal life and her teachings and the inconsistency in More's moral system as reflected in her lectures lend themselves to diverse interpretations. However, the extant scholarship on More

out new female fields were really fomenting the mid-Victorian feminist revolt." See Ray Strachey, "The Cause": A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928; rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969) 13.

⁴ Gerald Newman, "Anti-French Propaganda and British Liberal Nationalism in the Early Nineteenth Century: Suggestions toward a General Interpretation," Victorian Studies 18 (1975): 401.

⁵ Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 11 (1982): 199-216. See also her essay, "Hannah More's Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology," Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815 eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986) 264-84.

appears to me rather problematic. For example, Ford K. Brown seems to assert that More was unquestionably an advocate of evangelicalism. He says, "No one of Miss More's formal evangelical views, social, moral or doctrinal, was questioned at any time by any evangelical in any surviving record."⁶ But a commentary in the Evangelical Magazine on More's Cheap Repository Tracts discredits this claim: "We would recommend, as much as possible, the adoption of real facts on the ground of these little histories; as we think that danger of some kind usually lurks beneath the flowers of fiction."⁷ The founders of the Religious Tract Society assembled at that first historic breakfast at St. Paul's Coffee House in St. Paul's Churchyard, London (n.d.), because they regretted that Hannah More's tracts "did not contain a fuller statement of the great evangelical principles of Christian truth," and felt that they should unite to promote a new popular religious literature.⁸

Critical commentary certainly cannot exhaust the potential meanings of a text, but rather tends to isolate

⁶ Ford K. Brown, Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 105.

⁷ Gillian Avery, Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction 1770-1950 (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1975) 66.

⁸ Avery 66.

the aspects of its meaning which are intelligible or valuable to certain readers at certain times. My intention in this chapter is to isolate one aspect that has been neglected by the aforementioned critical opinions: that is, the ideological affinity between More's moral teaching and one of the most important philosophical theories in nineteenth-century England, namely, utilitarianism; to me this seems to be a gap which has been unduly ignored and which deserves exploration.

Probably the hint of any possible connection between More the "bishop"(according to Walpole),⁹ and the "pig philosophy," as utilitarianism is sometimes jokingly called, may be regarded by More's hagiographers as blasphemous and anachronistic as well. As utilitarianism and evangelicalism, the latter of which More was reputedly a zealous advocate, have been regarded as "poles apart in their intellectual postulates . . . ,"¹⁰ my argument may invite strong critical disagreement from More critics. Before I proceed any further, I would explain briefly the stance of post-structural Marxian theories, then erunciate my argument in that light.

⁹ Horace Walpole's Correspondence eds. W. S. Lewis, Robert A. Smith, and Charles H. Bennett 44 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) 31: 397.

¹⁰ Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973) 114.

According to Pierre Macherey, the text is never aware of what it is doing--it has an "unconsciousness." Ideology itself is normally seen as if it were a unified explanation of reality. But once it is worked into a text, all its contradictions and gaps are exposed. The contradictions of the text are not the reflection of real historical contradictions, neither are they the reflection of ideological ones. Rather, textual dissonances are the effect of a work's production of ideology. In the collisions between its divergent meanings, the text implicitly criticizes its own ideology; it contains within itself the critique of its own values. The realist writer intends to unify all the elements in the text, but the work that goes on in the textual process inevitably produces certain lapses and omissions which correspond to the incoherence of the ideological discourse it uses. The literary critic should not be concerned to show how all the parts of the work fit together, or to harmonise and smooth over any apparent contradictions, or to seek the unity of the work, but to consider the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings.¹¹

¹¹ Macherey points out:
Ce que dit le livre vient d'un certain silence: son apparition implique la "présence" d'un non-dit, matière à laquelle il donne forme, ou fond sur lequel il fait figure. Ainsi le livre ne se suffit pas à lui-même: nécessairement l'accompagne une certaine absence, sans laquelle il ne serait pas. Connaître le livre, cela implique qu'il soit tenu compte aussi de cette absence.

Fredric Jameson also discusses the theory of the "suppressed unconsciousness." In The Political Unconscious (1981) he argues that all ideologies are 'strategies of containment' which allow society to provide an explanation that suppresses the underlying contradictions of history; it is history itself which imposes this strategy of repression. Literary texts work in the same way: the solutions which they offer are merely symptoms of the suppression of history. The critic's task is to discover the possibilities that are not said. This "not said" is the repressed history.¹²

C'est pourquoi il semble bénéfique, et légitime, de se demander à propos de toute production ce qu'elle implique tacitement: sans le dire. L'explicite veut un implicite, tout autour ou à sa suite: car pour parvenir à dire quelque chose, il y en a d'autres qu'il ne faut pas dire. (emphasis added)

Pierre Macherey, Pour Une Théorie de la Production Littéraire (Paris: François Maspero, 1974) 105.
Translation by Geoffrey Wall:

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence.

This is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say. Either all around or in its wake the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said.

¹² Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

In this chapter I attempt to discover in the textual dissonance of More's work what is unsaid and what is hidden, which in its own way reveals the contradiction between the ideology More represents and the history itself. My basic argument is that, although More was reputedly an advocate of evangelical values, the contradictions and gaps in her texts reflect the repressed pressing historical necessity of her time: the ideological justification for capitalism. Hence her works bear much resemblance to utilitarianism, which was the spiritual child of capitalism. In keeping with the thematic concern of this thesis, I shall concentrate my discussion on More's views on luxury and the utilitarianism implied within the gaps and contradictions in More's discourse. Whether she is a conscious utilitarian or not has little bearing on my discussion. Moreover, as Jameson says in Marxism and Form (1971), an individual is always part of a larger structure (a tradition or a movement) or part of a historical situation.¹³ The fact that utilitarianism and evangelicalism often merged in the persons of individual men in the nineteenth century,¹⁴ and

¹³ Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 4.

¹⁴ See Altick, 168: "The two forces (utilitarianism and evangelicalism) often merged in the persons of individual men. It is a cliché of Victorian history that the weekday businessman was the Sunday evangelical. The eye that was fixed on the profit-and-loss ledger six days a week shifted to a hopeful contemplation of the heavenly account of the seventh, and the teachings of the political economists which

that the writing career of More (1745-1833) extends well into the merging period of these two forces, makes it more legitimate to compare the dual manifestation. I hope that this exploration will serve in its own way as a useful link between the late eighteenth-century luxury debate and Victorian ideology. My discussion will include the following aspects: 1. More's views on luxury in general 2. More's views on class and charity as related to luxury 3. More's ideas on domesticity and female education as related to luxury and 4. More's views on literature and the arts.

1. More's views on luxury in general

Biographical studies of More do not indicate that there was any personal connection between her and the founder of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), though the two were contemporaries. It should be noted, however, that Bentham did not achieve an immediate success in promoting his theories. His Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation was published in 1788 without attracting any attention. His invention of a novel type of prison, a circular prison equipped with a system of central supervision, the Panopticon or house where everything is visible, was also ignored by the British. It was not until 1813 that Parliament voted him an ample

moralized his activity from Monday to Saturday gave way to Scripture on the Sabbath."

indemnity as compensation for the losses incurred in his Panopticon proposal and his theory of the summum bonum gained popularity.¹⁵

It is also relevant to give a brief sketch of utilitarian doctrines before . proceed further in my discussion. Utilitarianism is a principle or doctrine of ethics proclaiming that only what is useful is good, and that usefulness (utility) can be rationally determined or measured by the often-repeated phrase, the greatest good for the greatest number (summum bonum). Jeremy Bentham was the one who first introduced the term in 1781. According to Bentham, the ethically good can be ascertained and proved, not by dogma or outside prescription but by starting from the elementary motivation of human nature--namely, the wish to obtain happiness or pleasure and to avoid pain. In An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) Bentham makes the following remarks:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are

¹⁵ For a detailed history of how Bentham gained recognition see Elie Halévy, England in 1815: A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1960) 577-9.

fastened to their throne.¹⁶

It must be pointed out, however, as Halévy noticed,¹⁷ that it would be a mistake to establish an irreconcilable opposition between the utilitarian ethic and the Christian on the ground that the former is founded on pleasure, the latter on sacrifice. For utilitarian morality cannot be described without qualification as hedonism. It was based simultaneously on two principles. One of these, it was true, was the identification of the good with pleasure; but the other, of equal importance with the former, was the duty incumbent upon man, in virtue of the natural conditions to which his life is subject, to sacrifice present pleasure to the hope of future, and purchase happiness at the cost of labour and suffering. This law of work, implicit in Bentham's moral arithmetic, was the principle which was explicitly proclaimed by the entire system of the classical political economy, and which introduced into utilitarianism an undeniable element of asceticism. Bentham's works, like Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, bear the striking mark of a balance between virtue and corruption.

More's views on luxury are full of textual and ideological dissonance. On one hand, she seems to take the

¹⁶ Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, eds. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London: The Athlone Press, 1970) 11.

¹⁷ Halévy 586.

stance of a high priestess of evangelicalism, whose value system is basically puritanical, and condemns luxury. For example, in "On Dissipation" and "On Public Amusement" she attacks the view that "Luxury and Dissipation are softer vices which . . . increase civilization" and contends that they are actually more pernicious than the most active vices: "Luxury and dissipation, soft and gentle as their approaches are, and silently as they throw their silken chains about the heart, enslave it more than the most active and turbulent vices."¹⁸ On the other hand, she appears quite Mandevillian in her argument that the lavish spending of the upper-class is beneficial for the poor. In Village Politics (1793), a political pamphlet written at the request of Beilby Porteus, the Bishop of London, Jack, the positive character, justifies luxury:

. . . still hoarding's not the sin of the age;
 they (the upper class) don't lock up their money--
 away it goes, and every body's the better for it.
 They do spend too much, to be sure, in feasting
 and fandan-goes, and if I was a parson I'd go to
 work with 'em in another kind of a way; but as I
 am only a poor tradesman, why 'tis but bringing
 more grist to my mill. It all comes among the
 people--Their coaches, and their furniture, and

¹⁸ Hannah More, The Works of Hannah More (New York: Harper, 1835) 28.

their buildings, and their planting, employ a power of tradespeople and labourers. Now in this village; what shou'd we do without the castle? Tho'my lady is too rantipolish, and flies about all summer to hot water and cold water, and fresh water and salt water, when she ought to stay at home with Sir John; yet when she does come down, she brings such a deal of gentry that I have more horses than I can shoe, and my wife more linen than she can wash. Then all our grown children are servants in the family, and rare wages they have got. Our little boys get something every day by weeding their gardens, and the girls learn to sew and knit at St. John's expense; who sends them all to school of a Sunday."¹⁹

Here More's argument is totally Mandevillian. However, in "The History of Mr. Fantom the New-fashioned Philosopher, and his man William," a story in her Cheap Repository Tracts, More tells the reader that because Mr. Fantom decides that "private vices are public benefits," his footman William takes to drinking as a way of making a contribution to the public good. Typical of the fate of

¹⁹ Hannah More, Village Politics: Addressed to All the Mechanics, Journeymen, and Day Labourers, in Great Britain. By Will Chip, a Country Carpenter (Cambridge, 1793) in Marilyn Butler ed. Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 182.

those who followed false principles, William goes from drink to theft to murder to hanging. The moral of this story is that the Mandevillian principle of Mr. Fantom is morally unacceptable. So what is More's attitude towards luxury, then? How are we to explain this ideological dissonance?

My view is that we should not be blind to the "repressed" message here (it does not have to be a conscious or even an unconscious one on the part of the author, according to Macherey's theory) which contains the utilitarian thought that what is materially beneficial for the majority of the people is good. In Village Politics the luxury of the rich contributes to the economy development of the village and creates job opportunities. Hence it is laudable, whereas in the story of Mr. Fantom and William, William the Footman's indulgence in drinking causes expenses which exceed his income and is, therefore, detrimental to himself even if it makes a financial contribution to the wine-selling business. Whether luxury should be applauded or condemned is not a set question; rather, it is dependent on the effect it has upon people. The utilitarians, recognizing the benefits of the extension of the market and the effects of flourishing commercialization, were voicing more or less the same sentiment.

According to Bentham, "luxury is rather a source of virtue than of vice," and the government should introduce or encourage the introduction of a luxurious lifestyle. Good

eating, elegance of dress and furniture, music and theatre should all be encouraged.²⁰ Luxury could become a moral force when it diverts anti-social desires into innocent pursuits. In the "Manual of Political Economy" he comments:

Luxury is not only an inseparable accompaniment to opulence, but increases in proportion to it. As men rise one above another in the scale of opulence, the upper one may, without excess, give into expenses which those below cannot give into without prodigality. It is therefore no more desirable that luxury should be repressed, than it is that opulence should be repressed--that is, that security should be diminished. If it were desirable that luxury should be repressed, it could be done no otherwise than either by depriving the more opulent classes of a part of their property in this view, or coercing them in the use of it. It would be less unreasonable to restrain prodigality wherever it is to be found, than to restrain the highest imaginable pitch of luxury on the part of those whose expense does not exceed their income.²¹

²⁰ Jeremy Bentham, The Works of Jeremy Bentham, 11 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell 1962) 1: 540-1.

²¹ Bentham, Works 3: 38.

Bentham is convinced that, if Cromwell had not been an ascetic and had seen the moral importance of luxury, he may not have felt obliged to engage England in unnecessary foreign wars.²² Thinking that prejudice should be removed against luxury, so that crimes would cease "almost entirely," Bentham even suggests that the term "luxury" should be replaced with "prosperity," because sometimes "a simple change in the name of the object suffices to change the sentiments of men."²³ More's unstated (or even unconscious) stance on luxury revealed in her texts seems

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- 22 When we consider these different sources of enjoyment, as opposed to the necessary means of providing subsistence, they are called objects of luxury: if their tendency be such as has been suggested, how singular soever it may appear, luxury is rather a source of virtue than of vice. . . . Cromwell, whose ascetic principles did not allow him to use this resource, had no other means of occupying the minds of his countrymen, than engaging the nation in foreign wars.

Bentham, Works 1: 541.

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- 23 Sometimes a simple change in the name of the objects suffices to change the sentiments of men. The Romans abhorred the name of king, but they suffered those of dictator and emperor. Cromwell would not have been able to place himself upon the throne of England; but he possessed, under the title of protector, an authority more unlimited than that of the king If the people were philosophers, this expedient would be worth nothing; but upon this point, philosophers are only men. How much deception is there in the words liberty and equality! What contradictions between that luxury which all the world condemns, and that prosperity which all the world admires!

Bentham, Works 1: 564.

similar.

2. More's views on class and charity as related to luxury

As I have noted in my previous chapters, eighteenth-century England was a highly class-conscious society. Hence the luxury debate involved attitudes towards class and class relationships. While reading More's works on class, I have often been struck by the textual and ideological dissonance in her theories, which aim at (consciously or unconsciously) creating the "strategy of containment" discussed by Jameson in The Political Unconscious. According to Jameson, the strategy of containment is a means of reconciling or accommodating the intolerable contradictions hidden beneath the social surface, and of rendering existence at least partly bearable.²⁴

It is a critical cliché to say that More was a defender of the traditional class hierarchy. As a matter of fact, Beilby Porteus, the Bishop of London, met More at Bath in 1792 and begged her to write something in simple words to open the eyes of uneducated people dazed by the words "liberty" and "equality." More at first refused because it was not in her line, but later she decided to comply.²⁵ Her pamphlet Village Politics (1793), written for that purpose,

²⁴ Jameson, The Political Unconscious 10, 53-4, 193-4.

²⁵ Hopkins 205.

has always been cited as the most illustrative evidence of More's stance as a Tory propagandist against class rebellion. However, not many critics have noticed that there are also egalitarian thoughts in More's didactic story, "The Two Wealthy Farmers." In the story Farmer Worthy (the positive character as the name suggests) asserts that if Jesus Christ died for no one particular rank, class, or community, then there is no one rank, class or community exempt from his laws.²⁶ Here at least More recognizes the equality before God of all mankind, even if she endorses the inequality of social classes. Also, in "Thoughts upon the Importance of the Manners of the Great" and "An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World," she attacks the moral depravity of the upper class and the poor moral example the rich set for the poor. But, given all the moral faults and the "equality before God" theory, how is More to justify and defend the status quo of the class hierarchy in her society? As Jameson argues, the notion of strategies of containment applies to works of literature. In literature the author always attempts (not necessarily consciously) to shut out or deny the intolerable reality of History. More's strategy of containment is to establish class hierarchy as a providential order; the lower order has to respect class

²⁶ Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Hannah More, Hymns in Prose for Children and Cheap Repository Tracts ed. James Silverman (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977) 7.

demarcation as a Christian principle.

Village Politics contains a dialogue between Jack Anvil, the blacksmith, and Tom Hod, the Mason. Tom is full of the egalitarian ideas imported from revolutionary France, whereas Jack stands for the voice of reason and religion-- or, as is generally believed, of More herself:

Jack. What is it you are crying out for, Tom?

Tom. Why for a perfect government.

Jack. You might as well cry for the moon. There's nothing perfect in this world, take my word for it . . .

Tom. But I say all men are equal. Why should one be above another?

Jack. If that's thy talk, Tom, thou dost quarrel with Providence and not with government. For the woman is below her husband, and the children are below their mother, and the servant is below his master.²⁷

In "Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic," More further argues that class subordination should be equated with the authority of God, and that insubordination is against Divine authority as well as a manifestation of luxury:

If we have begun to instruct the poor with a view

²⁷ Quoted in Butler 181.

to check the spirit of insubordination, that spirit requires little less suppression in our own families. In all ranks it is the prevailing evil of the present day. The diminished obedience of children to parents, of servants to masters, of subjects to sovereigns, all spring from one common root--an abatement of the reverence to the authority of God . . .

Do not the youth carry thither, rather than acquire there, this want of subordination? Is it not too often previously fostered at home by the habits of luxury, the taste for expense, the unrestrained indulgences, the unsubdued tempers, which so ill prepare them to submit to moral discipline? Laxity of manners and of principles act reciprocally: they are alternately cause and effect.²⁸

Her ballad "Patient Joe, or the Newcastle Collier" teaches the moral that one should "bow to God's holy will" and never doubt providential wisdom.²⁹ As another "strategy of

²⁸ More, Works 449-50.

²⁹ He prais'd his Creator whatever befell;
 How thankful was Joseph when matters went well!
 How sincere were his carols of praise for good health,
 And how grateful for any increase in his wealth!

In trouble he bow'd him to God's holy will;
 How contented was Joseph when matters went ill!

containment," to appease any resentment arising from the inequality in wealth distribution on the part of the poor, More had to invoke the myth that the rich would suffer in another world. In "Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great" More predicts that "in a future state," the rich man will be "lifting up his eyes, [his] being in torments." His punishment is "the consequence of an irreligious, a worldly spirit, a heart corrupted by the softness and delights of life."³⁰ Obviously, the point More tries to convey here is that, if rich men are corrupted by luxury, they will be punished by Heaven accordingly; political action on the part of the lower-class to redress the wrongs of the upper class manifests a lack of faith in providential wisdom.³¹

It must be noted that, although More also condemns luxury among the upper class, she takes care not to criticize too much the general social evils characteristic of people in the higher ranks of society. She points out

When rich and when poor he alike understood
That all things together were working for good.

Hannah More, "Patient Joe; Or, the Newcastle Collier", Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts (London: Rivington, Evans & Hatchard; Bath: Hazard, 1798) 387.

³⁰ More, Works 263.

³¹ Actually More is here, as elsewhere, echoing passages from the New Testament, such as Matthew 19:23, 24, Mark 10:25.

venial faults and avoids the serious ones--for example, calling in the hairdresser on Sunday; asking servants to lie to unwelcome guests that their masters or mistresses are "not at home" instead of "not receiving"; having concerts on Sunday, etc. But nothing is said about the possible corruption among the upper class, the sexual promiscuity, or the heavy gambling portrayed in literary works by Henry Fielding and others.

More's strict adherence to the existing class division is also reflected in her assertion that the upper class should not mix with the lower class. For example, in Coelebs in Search of a Wife, More makes it clear that she "does not approve of too great familiarity with servants" and she ridicules a young woman of the upper class who "quotes the coachman as her authority."³² In More's portrayal of both the upper class and lower class, the latter is usually represented as having more vice than the former. For example, in Cheap Repository Tracts the "bad characters" are all from the lower class, including Black Giles, the poacher and Tawny Rachel, the fortune teller. More presents them as lazy, greedy and deceitful and deserving of punishment. Gary Kelly points out that More's class bias is also reflected in her deployment of dialect or "sociolect"; the authoritative characters (middle class) and

³² More, Works 332, 357.

especially the clergymen speak in standard written English, whereas the unredeemable people from the lower class are characterized by the most "deviant" speech. But the converted or convertible poor speak more "correctly"--in imitation of their "betters."³³

One may well ask why there should be such a "strategy of containment" in More's texts? As I have pointed out, there is evidence that More was aware of the moral faults of the upper class and had the conviction that all men were equal before God despite their social rank. What is hidden, then, behind these ideological gaps and dissonances? A look at Bentham's utilitarian view might be helpful. Bentham was strongly against any prejudices based on race, class, or religion. However, even in his section on the equality in "Constitutional Code" he does not discuss the phenomenon of class inequality.³⁴ On the contrary, Bentham asserts that inequality will always exist because the lower class is too much absorbed in earning a livelihood, and does not have the time, energy, desire or need to develop social and semi-social motives.³⁵ Thus it

³³ Gary Kelly, "Revolution, Reaction, and the Expropriation of Popular Culture: Hannah More's Cheap Repository," Man and Nature 6 (1987): 152-3.

³⁴ Bentham, Works 9: 14-8.

³⁵ The unequal gifts of nature and of fortune will always create jealousies: there will always be opposition of interests; and, consequently,

needs to be regulated by the government. The government must ensure that members of the lower class pursue their interests intelligently and without causing mischief. The government should also devise a system of law that, by a complicated and ingenious pattern of regulations, will ensure that no member of society, but particularly no member of the working class, will ever find it in his interest to harm others.³⁶ Bentham also thinks that "the unemployed, the poor, the vagrants, the lazy lay-about are the greatest danger to society, and can only be deterred by appearances of terrifying punishment and turned into honest men by

rivalries and hatred. Pleasures will be purchased by pains; enjoyments by privations. Painful labour, daily subjection, a condition nearly allied to indigence, will always be the lot of numbers. Among the higher as well as the lower classes, there will be desires which cannot be satisfied; inclinations which must be subdued: reciprocal security can only be established by the forcible renunciation by each one, of every thing which might wound the legitimate rights of others.

Bentham, Works 1: 194.

Bhikhu Parekh points out that, according to utilitarianism, the semi-social motive develops in four ways: 1. Mutual dependence makes man desirous of the good-will of others. 2. A man should obtain the services of others by showing concern for their interest. 3. Even when a man needs to earn others' services, he might ignore their interest if they are not sufficiently intelligent. 4. Even if a community was generally enlightened and intelligent, it would have no check on its members if it did not have an intimate knowledge of their conduct and pattern of life. See Bhikhu Parekh, preface, Ten Critical Essays, by Jeremy Bentham (London: Frank Cass, 1974) xvii.

³⁶ Bentham, Works 1: 194.

prisons modelled after the ingenious Panopticon."³⁷

Bentham's utilitarian arguments were based on the conviction that keeping the lower class in subordination is in the best interests of the old aristocracy as well as the fast-expanding middle class in England after the French Revolution. It is Bentham's opinion that only the middle class can undertake the historic mission of promoting the progress and civilization of human society. More's theories of class are similar to Bentham's utilitarian arguments.

Charity is related to the theories of class and class relationship. It represents an important aspect of the luxury debate because the problem of how to reappropriate wisely the money saved from conspicuous consumption is important for philanthropists. Moreover, as E. P. Thompson points out, towards the end of the eighteenth century, "most men and women of property felt the necessity for putting the houses of the poor in order."³⁸ More is chiefly known as an advocate of philanthropy and a founder of the charity school movement. Since M. G. Jones has given a full delineation of More's role in the rise of the charity

³⁷ Bentham, Works 4: 40-172.

³⁸ E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 60.

school in The Charity School Movement,³⁹ it is not my intention to repeat it here. However, it is interesting to observe how More's theory of charity serves as a "strategy of containment" and to note what is hidden behind the gaps between More's theory of charity and Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, the possession of private property carried with it certain duties dictated by God's design in creating the world. God had provided abundant material goods for the satisfaction of human needs, and the division and appropriation of property, which proceeds from human law, was not supposed to hinder the satisfaction of man's necessity from such goods. According to Claeys's interpretation of Aquinas,

Aquinas's stewardship conception of property, then, was based on the conclusion that whatever anyone had 'in superabundance' was 'owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance.' In case the duties of property were neglected, this natural right was moreover so clear and strong, so 'perfect' in the later language of some natural jurisprudence, that "when the poor were in danger of starvation and had no other means of satisfying their need, they might 'take what is

³⁹ M. G. Jones, The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action (London: Frank Cass, 1964) passim.

necessary from another's goods, either openly or by stealth', and this was not, 'strictly speaking, fraud or robbery'."⁴⁰ (emphasis added)

That is to say, Aquinas thinks that the right of private property is not absolute, and the riot of the poor in times of emergency is justifiable.

More's idea of charity combines class subordination with utility. For the upper class, she does not preach Christian stewardship theory; instead, she emphasizes that sparing something on one's part can maximize happiness. Her argument is economical, rather than moral: in Coelebs in Search of a Wife Sir John says, "How little a way will that sum go in superfluities, which will make two honest couples happy! How costly is vanity, how cheap is charity!"⁴¹ But the purpose of charitable acts is to lend a poor man assistance, to make him useful, to "put him in a way which shall call him to the performance of more duties", not to set him above his natural condition.⁴² Furthermore, More thinks that the poverty and misery of the labouring poor are

⁴⁰ Gregory Claeys, Machinery, Money and the Millennium: from Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-1860 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 6-7.

⁴¹ More, Works 390.

⁴² Barbauld and More 26.

caused by their own faults.⁴³ So in financial adversity the poor should not attempt to better their lot by challenging the status quo. The rich would never assist those who dare to raise a riot:

Those who have been seen aiding or abetting any Riot, any attack on butchers, bakers, wheat mows, mills or millers, we will not relieve. With the quiet, contented, hard-working man, I will share my last morsel of bread. I shall only add, that though it has pleased God to send us this visitation [famine] as a punishment, yet we may convert this short trial into a lasting blessing, if we all turn over a new leaf.⁴⁴

In "Black Giles, the Poacher" she stresses that the law is not to be challenged and that the poor should regard private property as inviolably sacred, as Mr. Wilson, one of More's "positive characters," comments, "It is not your business

⁴³ Gary Kelly makes the following point: Cheap Repository's pseudo-popular chapbooks consistently argue that the poverty and misery of the labouring poor are caused not by "things as they are" but by their own idleness, folly, bad management, and mistaken attempts to emulate their betters--their attitude of carpe diem, their interest in luck and fortune-telling, their fatalism and improvidence, their toleration of petty crime on grounds of need, their habits of deceiving their masters, and their imitation of the upper-class amorous culture of gallantry, seduction, and betrayal. (Kelly 151.)

⁴⁴ Barbauld and More 22.

nor mine, John, to settle whether the game laws are good or bad. Till they are repealed we must obey them."⁴⁵ And "All property is sacred, and as the laws of the land are intended to fence in that property, he who brings up his children to break down any of these fences, brings them up to certain sin and ruin."⁴⁶ So obviously More's theory of charity is entirely different from the Thomist Christian theory.

More's way of practising her theory of charity among the lower class deserves attention, because in it we see how her "strategy of containment" is applied. We should remember that More's period was one of sharp inequities, in Hopkin's view, "a period of gross eating among many of the rich and of food shortages among the poor."⁴⁷ In her Somerset parish the poor lived on scanty food. The More sisters taught the housewives of the poor families to brew their own beer as a substitute for gin and tea, to make bread of wheat and potato, and to cut bread economically (instead of cutting bread hot from the oven, which was wasteful, one should cut day-old bread to make the most of

⁴⁵ Barbauld and More 25.

⁴⁶ Barbauld and More 26.

⁴⁷ Hopkins 176.

it).⁴⁸ In More's writing the preparation and consumption of food play an important part. Her Cottage Cook gives advice for buying groceries as well as detailed recipes, to make coarse food palatable. "Tom White," a story in Cheap Repository Tracts about an industrious postilion who becomes well-to-do by honesty and thrift, contains directions for making rice milk, rice pudding, stew, and turnip soup, although the recipes themselves are irrelevant to the plot. In More's charity schools all the useful techniques in housekeeping are taught so that the students might put them to use in their own home or in domestic service. Hopkins describes More's schools as follows:

A School of Industry was frequently associated with a Bible School, and in it girls were taught spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing, cooking and other household techniques needed in one's own home or in domestic service

The girls were taught housework in the school and sent on certain days to the houses of well-to-do families who had sober servants, to help the housekeeper, the cook, the parlor maid, or the laundress as apprentices, to practise by helping the servants. After a time servants trained in

⁴⁸ Hopkins 177-8.

the Cheddar school were in demand.⁴⁹

The motto in which the lower-class children were indoctrinated at the charity school More founded was: "Make me dutiful and obedient to my benefactors."⁵⁰ This motto can be seen as a means of offsetting the consequence warned by Mandeville in his "On Charity and the Charity Schools,"⁵¹ that the education of the poor would instill discontent and make them rebellious. More's predecessor John Brown (1715-66) discussed this issue in more or less the same spirit,⁵² and More's contemporary, Sarah Trimmer, did not hesitate to use the worldly argument that the purpose of charity or charitable education for the poor is to train the lower orders to be better servants for the upper class. As Avery recorded,

"Do we wish our daughters to have modest, discreet, trusty maid-servants?" she [Trimmer] demanded, and reminded them how important it was

⁴⁹ Hopkins 172-3.

⁵⁰ David Owen, English Philanthropy: 1660-1960 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 27.

⁵¹ Bernard Mandeville, "On Charity and the Charity Schools" The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, rpt.1957) 1: 354.

⁵² See James E. Crimmins, "Legislating Virtue: John Brown's Scheme for National Education," Man and Nature 9 (1990): 69-85.

that these should be of good principles, not in league with robbers, and that they did not keep their employers in a constant state of suspicion and uneasiness with their immoralities, nor with their gross wastefulness.⁵³

Now, why does More deviate from the Thomist doctrine? What is the "repressed" text? From a historical point of view, More's charity theory is actually an indication of the collapse of the concept of moral economy at the end of the eighteenth century. According to Claeys, the social position of the poor had been weakened through the reinforcement of private property rights, and the secularization of the natural law tradition, by which an original divine intention favouring the needy was gradually replaced by an historical account of the growth of inequality. Moreover, it was the pressure of population growth in particular that made the notion of a general right to charity unpopular.⁵⁴ More's text reflects an awareness that eighteenth-century society had developed into a commercial structure; hence the Thomist theory of charity was no longer viable. In "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" More argues that in doing a charitable act one should never set the recipient above his natural position. This is

⁵³ Avery 59.

⁵⁴ Claeys 187-8.

actually in conformity with the eighteenth-century upper class notion that wages at subsistence level kept the laboring class from unduly increasing or decreasing in the numbers needed to fill available jobs (because, if the labourer has extra money, he would stop work).⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that utilitarianism is, by the same token, not compatible with the requirements of justice or equity in the distribution of benefits, since maximizing utility by itself does not seem to require that benefits should be distributed according to merit or need.⁵⁶ Hume, to whom Bentham is indebted, asserts that "It would be greater cruelty to dispossess a man of anything, than not to give it to him."⁵⁷

More's theories of charity, then, become more comprehensible if they are viewed in the light of utilitarianism. Looking at the historical record of More's period, one can see that her lectures on class subordination and civil order did have utilitarian significance. In the century before 1765, Britain had normally exported a corn surplus. Thereafter, she became a net importer, and when, by the 1790s, scarcity began to give way to famine,

⁵⁵ Hopkins 205.

⁵⁶ Thomas K. Hearn Jr. ed. Studies in Utilitarianism (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1971) 10.

⁵⁷ David Hume, Treatise of Human Nature (London, 1740) 3: 482. See Anthony Quinton, Utilitarian Ethics (Essex: The Anchor Press Ltd. 1973) 81.

philanthropic means of assisting the necessitous poor were totally inadequate. At least a thousand food riots were recorded in this period in which grain and foodstuffs were either stolen directly, seized and sold at a reduced or 'fair' price, or prevented from being transported to other areas or out of the country.⁵⁸ More's lecture on "no challenge of the existing property distributing system" and her teaching on how to make the best of the scanty food supply certainly aimed at decreasing the potential for riots and restoring the status quo of her society. It should be noted that the focus of More's lecture on how to live frugally and how to make the best use of the scanty means one has is in accordance with Bentham's idea of pauper management, which is to give the lower class the essential information about life and society, and to instil in them a spirit of frugality and self-help.⁵⁹ In Bentham's pauper management system, charity should be combined with utility, the poor should be governed by an "all-employing" principle and not be pampered with unnecessary comforts or luxury.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Claeys 19.

⁵⁹ Bentham, Works 8: 430-2.

⁶⁰ Bentham, Works 8: 435: Necessaries, together with the stock of comforts of course, ingrafted on them, as it were, by the system of management, being afforded as above, to all without distinction, and provision made for the specific claims just now enumerated, these extra-comforts, and whatever else is beyond necessities--everything that comes under

He proposes a number of institutions and practices that in his view would encourage and enable the lower classes to stand on their own feet, to save, and to plan their marriages and families according to their means. In the section called "Augmentation of Useful Knowledge" Bentham discusses in detail the importance of teaching domestic economy to the poor; food and fuel are mentioned before anything else.⁶¹ Also, in the section of "Poor Law" he lists in detail the policy of distribution and appropriation of fish and meat for the pauper population.⁶²

More's argument that charity is a cheap way of expanding happiness also is analogous to Bentham's theory of benevolence. In Bentham's view, benevolence grows out of man's desire to pursue his own interest, and is socially acquired. When an individual realizes that his happiness depends on others' cooperation, that he needs their services, he comes to pursue activities that will please

the head of superfluity and luxury--however innocent, and how much soever the utmost possible extension of such benefits to be wished--may be left, it should seem, not only with strict propriety, but with very tolerable security, to rest upon no firmer nor broader basis than that of contingent and spontaneous beneficence.

⁶¹ Bentham, Works 8: 425.

⁶² Bentham, Works 8: 432.

them and earn him moral capital.⁶³ While demonstrating as above that More's theory of charity is more Benthamite than Thomist, I am not trying to establish an argument that More was an unconscious co-author of the Benthamite utilitarian theories; rather, I mean to point out that More's text reveals the "repression" of the underlying contradictions between More's stance as a Christian and as a defender of the status quo.

3. More's ideas on domesticity and female education as related to luxury

More's system of education in her charity school is obviously one that prepares children to act consistently with the values of the middle class. A look at her theory of female education as related to luxury will further illustrate how More struggles to use the "strategies of containment" (Jameson), and how all the ideological gaps and dissonances reveal the "unsaid"--the conflict between the ideology she represents and the repressed history. One of the most important features of More's ideas on luxury and female education is the recurrent subject of "Domus" (domesticity). However, there are considerable ambiguities and inconsistencies in her definitions of Domus and the role of women. On one hand, More asserts, as in "On Dissipation

⁶³ Bentham, Works 1: 56-7, 144.

and the Modern Habits of Fashionable Life," that the woman's place should be in the home, and any woman who frequents public places would make a disappointing wife.⁶⁴ In Coelebs Lucilla, the ideal woman that Coelebs seeks is, like Richardson's middle-class heroine Clarissa, a domestic paragon: she rises early, makes breakfast for her parents; works in the garden; teaches her little sisters; and sets one day in the week aside to work for the poor. Her dress is always simple, "neither neglected," nor "studied." In a word, she is a domestic angel who is free from the taint of luxury, who knows how to spend money wisely and manages the household well. Communal life, with the exception of churchgoing, is despised by More in favor of domestic life.⁶⁵ Home is the bulwark against luxury and vice, while the outer world is hostile and morally degenerating. Terry Eagleton observes that, while arising in the masculine domain of economics and politics where history occurs, ideology is subsequently taken into the household through the private world of individual consciousness.⁶⁶ More's advice on domestic economy for lower-class women, such as

⁶⁴ More, Works 605.

⁶⁵ See Susan Pedersen, "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England," Journal of British Studies 25 (1986): 91.

⁶⁶ Terry Eagleton, Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës (Houndmills: The MacMillan Press Ltd. 1975) 4.

using food wisely, encouraged the poor to be content with their lot and to make the best of their scarcity. Hence, the concept of Domus functions like a dose of spiritual opium. It cushions the destructive effect of early factory industrialization on cohesive family life, gives the lower-class women an illusion that the material conditions of a society can be changed for the better by the individual's self-regulation, without any radical reform in the system itself, and consequently eliminates any possible challenge to the political status quo, the existing class hierarchy, the wealth distributing system and the existence of private property. So the emphasis on Domus is actually in accordance with More's theory of class subordination and charity.

More's emphasis on Domus is also an affirmation of the Protestant ethic critical for the development of capitalism within the household and the private world to which Eagleton refers. As I demonstrated above, the ideal middle-class women in More's view are simple, disdainful of luxury, productive and useful, opposite to the image of the luxurious, idle, unproductive and useless aristocratic women. By portraying these model women, More teaches the bourgeoisie/Protestant ethic that, while bourgeois men accumulate and acquire wealth, their women must learn to spend money wisely, to save capital in order to reinvest it. Saving, and practising frugality, are typical capitalist

virtues, as Kramnick points out: "Self-denial is the cornerstone of capitalism."⁶⁷ More's conception of the domestic woman indicates that she was a defender of rising bourgeois values. Moreover, as Catherine Hall points out, the evangelical ideology of Domus heavily influenced by More was a response to the changing social relations of production and reproduction.⁶⁸

From the evangelical point of view, More's emphasis on Domus has its significance. The cohesive force of family enables the evangelists to use family networks to extend their missions. Deborah M. Valenze points out that popular evangelicalism dwelt upon two principal themes: the sanctification of the home and the embarkation upon a spiritual pilgrimage.⁶⁹ Also, More's teaching on how to use food wisely has its impact on evangelical teaching in which food plays an important role. Valenze gives the following explanation:

⁶⁷ Issac Kramnick, "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Observations on Culture and Industrial Capitalism in the Later Eighteenth Century," Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to the Enlightenment, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 219.

⁶⁸ Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology," Fit Work for Women ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 29.

⁶⁹ Deborah M. Valenze, Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 28.

Women, more often than men, engaged in sacred ritual pertaining to food. Their familial and social roles required involvement in the production, preparation, and distribution of sustenance that naturally encouraged such acts. But more important to the rendering of food as sacred was the link between spirituality and physicality pungently experienced by women during their life cycles. Physical maturation, menstruation, procreation, and lactation impressed upon women an immediate sense of life and death, and hence, of the presence of the supernatural in daily life. Early Christian theology stressed a similar connection between the physical nature of woman and the flesh of Christ, a teaching which gave rise among women to widespread fasting and feasting as a means of mythical union with God.⁷⁰

To cite an example, Elizabeth Gaunt, a Derbyshire evangelical preacher, prayed for the multiplication of provisions and even searched for manna that would aid in maintaining her people. More's lecturing on domestic expediency, especially on the use of food, lends support, on a secular level, to the evangelical sanctification of the link between materiality and spirituality.

⁷⁰ Valenze 39-40.

It should be pointed out, however, that the notion of the private home as a bulwark against social instability was no longer sufficient to ward off political subversion in a fast-developing industrial capitalist society at the end of the eighteenth century. Thus we see how More uneasily tries to strike a balance between public and private domain: she has to redefine Domus in "Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education":

Now it is pretty clear, in spite of modern theories, that the very frame and being of societies, whether great or small, public or private, is jointed and glued together by dependence. Those attachments which arise from, and are compacted by, a sense of mutual wants, mutual affection, mutual benefit, and mutual obligation, are the cement which secures the union of the family as well as of the State.⁷¹

This redefinition of "Domus" conveniently joins domesticity and patriotism. This clever verbal playing, fusing the private household with the public community, indicates an effort on More's part to reconcile the conflict between the bourgeois notion of the sanctity of the home in a society of industrial capitalism (which was further developed in the Victorian era) and utopian socialist reform. The

⁷¹ More, Works 186-7.

evangelists were well aware of this necessity of reconciliation, as Valenze points out:

Religion redefined private, domestic concerns as public and political issues. Every aspect of behavior and thought, from the personal and domestic to the public and communal, became significant. By definition, sectarianism required a thorough, uncompromising commitment that made no distinction between inward and outward or private and public. Followers scrutinized themselves and each other in fear that a lapse in one sphere might infect the other. The selfishness of individuals, for example, might extend to their families and communities.⁷²

Utilitarianism also asserts that the sustenance of society's morality depends on the visibility of its members; hence the community should be like an extended home. In Deontology Bentham asserts that even if a community was generally enlightened and intelligent, it would have no check on its members if it did not have an intimate knowledge of their conduct and pattern of life. As the effectiveness of social sanction depends on the degree of its members' visibility, publicity is 'the best guardian of virtue.' He gave the instance that a Turk shut in his own

⁷² Valenze 33.

harem would not be concerned with general moral esteem.⁷³

It should also be noted that Robert Owen put the idea of fusing the private household with the public community into practice in his model factory.⁷⁴

The discussion of the private and public moral implications of Domus leads to the issue of whether it is one's duty to "live in the world" and, consequently, to the issue of primitivism. More was known to be opposed to passive female retirement. John Newton of Olney, one of the dynamic evangelical figures of the late eighteenth century and the real founder of the evangelical school in the Church of England, advised both More and William Wilberforce that one has "to work for God by participation in and not by detachment from the world."⁷⁵ It is recorded by More's biographer that John Wesley once said to More's sister, "Tell her to live in the world: there is the sphere of her usefulness."⁷⁶ More often points out that, instead of cloistered virtue, the active virtue of a woman lies in her capability of performing practical duties within and outside her home, or, in the words of Mitzi Myers, "private

⁷³ Bentham, Works 10: 145.

⁷⁴ Halévy 585.

⁷⁵ Jones 91.

⁷⁶ Meakin 390.

amendments with public reverberations."⁷⁷ In Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great More criticizes the idealistic attempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners, saying that it would be unjust and absurd not to form opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. She adds that one should make the best of the times in which one lives to fill up the measure of one's own actual, particular, and individual duties, instead of taking a romantic flight into impracticable perfection.⁷⁸ In her moral parable "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" the Shepherd tells Mr. Johnson that people cannot escape the corruptions of their own evil even if they live on the wild solitary hill, so retirement from the world does not exclude evil.⁷⁹ Similarly, in her chapter on retirement in "Christian Morals," More points out that to escape from the corruption of the world is actually flying from one's religious and social duty. Unlike Sarah Scott, who asserted that for women the effective way to combat luxury is to create a female Utopia isolated from the outer world, More points out that

Women are not sent into the world to shun society,

⁷⁷ Myers 210.

⁷⁸ More, Works 288.

⁷⁹ Barbauld and More 22.

but to embellish it; they are not designed for wilds and solitudes, but for the amiable and endearing offices of social life. They have useful stations to fill, and important characters to sustain. They are of a religion which does not impose penances, but enjoins duties . . . a religion which does not condemn its followers to indolent seclusion from the world, but assigns them the more dangerous, though more honourable province, of living uncorrupted in it.⁸⁰

Thus More has actually elevated "living in the world" to a height of heroism.

In Coelebs More reiterates this point. Lady Aston's secluded life is disapproved because she has neglected to "qualify her daughters for the present temporal life, on the due use and employment of which so obviously depends the happiness of that which is eternal."⁸¹ Towards the end of the novel, Mr. Stanley, the moral mentor figure, sums up More's idea of "living in the world" by pointing out that, in filial education, especially in the education of daughters, Christian parents should act on a broader and more liberal principle. The French women of fashion under the old régime, he argues, were bred in convents, yet they

⁸⁰ More, Works 35-6.

⁸¹ More, Works 339.

were even more licentious when marriage had set them at liberty. Mr. Stanley goes on to maintain that too many religious people fancy that the infectious air of the world is confined to the ballroom, or the play-house, and that when they have escaped from these, they are beyond the reach of its contagion. But the contagion follows wherever there is a human heart left to its own natural impulse.⁸²

However, whether More's emphasis on "living in the world" derives from the Christian faith "to fight God's battle" or from utilitarian concerns is debatable.

As we see in the following argument of More, the concern is more utilitarian than Christian:

Those who retire on no other principle but to escape trouble without turning their leisure to the benefits it is calculated to impart, are happy only on the low condition of being useless . . . [in] a retirement which does not involve benefit to others, as well as improvement to ourselves, we fail of the great purpose for which we came into the world, for which we withdrew from it.⁸³

More's contemporary Scottish optimists, from whom Bentham borrowed quite a great deal for his utilitarian theory, voiced opinions in the same spirit. Adam Ferguson, for

⁸² More, Works 433-4.

⁸³ More, Works 165.

example, argues that it is foolish of man to expect to discover an ideal type or model that would effect a radical change of course. Man must understand the fabric of his own society and preserve its institutional structures.⁸⁴

Bentham himself has not made a detailed analysis of any specific utopian social model, but he does discuss the unreasonableness of the claims of utopianists and points out the impossible realization of Utopia, given the imperfection of established political systems.⁸⁵ So More's teaching "living in the world" appears to be the production of an anti-Utopian myth necessary to enable people to live within the existing social formation.

On the issue of the typical eighteenth-century

⁸⁴ Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society ed. D. Forbes (Edinburgh, 1966). Also see Malcolm Jack: Corruption & Progress: The Eighteenth-Century Debate (New York: AMS Press, 1989) 137.

⁸⁵ Bentham, Works 2: 459:
 In Sir Thomas More's romance, from which the epithet Utopian has its origin, a felicitous state of things is announced by the very name. . . .
 If the established state of things, including the abuse which in so many shapes is interwoven in it, were anything like what the indiscriminating defenders of it represent it as being--viz. a system of perfection--in this actually established system (real in so far as abuse and imperfection are ascribed to it--imaginary in so far as exemption from such abuse and imperfection is ascribed to it)--might indeed be seen an Utopia--a felicitous result-flowing from causes not having it in their nature to be productive of any such effects, but having it in their nature to be productive of contrary effects.

urban-rural dichotomy, More does not resemble Sarah Scott, Goldsmith or the others who clearly identify urban value with corruption, and rural value with simplicity. Her attitude, in fact, is curiously ambivalent. Needless to say, More herself enjoyed Cowslip Green, her country cottage. In Cheap Repository Tracts, too, she depicts London as the epitome of luxury and vice: gambling, drinking, prostitution, idleness, the place where the characters in the stories meet ruin, morally as well as physically. However, More has emphasized more than once that rural life is not necessarily superior to urban life. She contends that one cannot place too much emphasis on the advantage of country life, since there are the millions who are doomed to live in towns.⁸⁶

Evangelicalism, as we know, tried to affirm the value of the outmoded agricultural way of life since it had its base chiefly in the agrarian population. The fact that More did not particularly set country value above urban value does seem curious. The suppressed text here, I think, is the growing awareness of the inevitable commercialization and industrialization of English society. It is worth keeping in mind that the utilitarians thought that capitalist commercialization and industrialization would develop sympathy and benevolence and promote the social and

⁸⁶ More, Works 386.

moral relations of human beings; hence they are very important to society.⁸⁷

* * *

In More's system of female education her definition of woman's role is rather ambiguous. By teaching women how to manage the family economy wisely, More tries to change the traditional image of woman from a luxurious consumer into a wise capital saver, and even a moral leader. More's ideal woman is, apart from being a good planner in domestic economy, the redeemer and the reclamer of the fallen man. In her story "Carpenter, or, the Dangers of Evil Company" it is the wife who restores her drunken and irresponsible husband back to a virtuous lifestyle. This is in accordance with what Olwen Hufton says about primitive Methodism, which "provided another strategy that contributed towards an economy of expedients and likewise thrust women into a central position in the family."⁸⁸ Valenze also notices

⁸⁷ Bentham, Works 1: 563:

In commerce, ignorant nations have treated each other as rivals, who could only rise upon the ruins of one another. The work of Adam Smith is a treatise upon universal benevolence because it has shown that commerce is equally advantageous for all nations--each one profiting in a different manner, according to its natural means; that nations are associates and not rivals in the grand social enterprise.

⁸⁸ Olwen Hufton, "Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France," French Historical Studies 9 (1975): 19.

that the world of women and domestic life could challenge the institutions and values articulated at the center of society. As bearers of cultural values and transmitters of class attitudes, women constituted a formidable force capable of massive reformist efforts.⁸⁹ However, More's ideal woman is seen only in relation to man, as she is relegated to a dependent role. In Coelebs, More defines the model wife as "a directress for a man's family, a preceptress for his children, and a companion for himself."⁹⁰ Coelebs defines his standard for a perfect wife,

In such a companion I do not want a Helen, a Saint Cecilia, or a Madame Dacier; yet she must be elegant or I should not love her; sensible, or I should not respect her; prudent, or I should not confide in her; well-informed, or she could not educate my children; well-bred, or she could not entertain my friends; consistent, or I should offend the shade of my mother; pious, or I should not be happy with her.⁹¹

So we have a mixed image of woman as a moral leader who can,

⁸⁹ Valenze 9.

⁹⁰ More, Works 317.

⁹¹ More, Works 309.

paradoxically, exist nowhere except in a secondary position in a male-centred household. What is more paradoxical is the fact that, being an independent woman herself, while enunciating her ideas on female education, More spares no pains in attacking the independent female who ventures into the male field of education. In Coelebs Miss Rattle is ridiculed for her learning of "gilding, japanning, modelling, etching, dancing, playing harp and piano," plus a little "history, geography, astronomy, grammar, botany, chemistry and experimental philosophy."⁹²

Ironically enough, More's whole idea of female education is marriage-market oriented rather than principle-originated; the female virtues become an investment in the women's marketable value. While talking about female modesty in Coelebs More comments,

Oh, if women in general knew what was their real interest! if they could guess with what a charm even the appearance of modesty invests its possessor, they would dress decorously from mere self-love, if not from principle. The designing would assume modesty as an artifice; the coquet would adopt it as an allurements, the pure as her appropriate attraction, and the voluptuous as the

⁹² More, Works 357.

most infallible art of seduction.⁹³ (emphasis added)

As the majority of the "customers" on the marriage market are the rising bourgeoisie instead of the aristocracy, usefulness replaces decorativeness in More's advices. Nancy Armstrong points out in Desire and Domestic Fiction that

It was the new domestic woman rather than her counterpart, the new economic man, who first encroached upon aristocratic culture and seized authority from it. This writing assumed that an education ideally made a woman desire to be what a prosperous man desires, which is above all else a female. She therefore had to lack the competitive desires and worldly ambitions that consequently belonged--as if by some natural principle--to the male. For such a man, her desirability hinged upon an education in frugal domestic practices. She was supposed to complement his role as an earner and producer with hers as a wise spender and tasteful consumer. Such an ideal relationship presupposed a woman whose desires were not of necessity attracted to material things. But because a woman's desire could in fact be manipulated by signs of wealth and position, she

⁹³ More, Works 189.

required an education.⁹⁴

Realizing that in a developing capitalist society women who are wise consumers and capital regulators are more marketable on the marriage market, More bases the value of the subjects of education for women solely on their usefulness; learning of no practical use is despised in her syllabi. Sir John in Coelebs comments satirically,

A philosophical lady may read Malebranche, Boyle, and Locke: she may boast of her intellectual superiority; she may talk of abstract and concrete; of substantial forms and essences; complex ideas and mixed modes, of identity and relation; she may decorate all the logic of one sex with all the rhetoric of the other; yet if her affairs are délabrés, if her house is disorderly, her servants irregular, her children neglected, and her table ill arranged, she will indicate the want of the most valuable faculty of the human mind, a sound judgment.⁹⁵

Later, Mr. Flam, another character in Coelebs, again confirms that it is the practical domestic knowledge in a woman that ensures a husband's happiness, when he says that

⁹⁴ Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 59.

⁹⁵ More, Works 396.

he would rather see his daughter making tansey-pudding than taking music and "whim-whams"; her knowledge of whether pie-crust is made of butter or cheese, or whether a venison pasty should be baked or boiled, is preferable to her capability of singing like a nightingale.⁹⁶ Similarly, in "The Two Wealthy Farmers" the fashionable but frivolous education of Miss Bragwell is ridiculed, whereas the sensible and practical education of Farmer Worthy's daughters, which includes reading, writing, book-keeping, and supervising dairy work, is approved. In addition to that, in "On the Education of Women" and "On Female Study" More despises the kind of education that makes women decorative and frivolous. Apart from the practical domestic knowledge, for the moral aspect of education, More asserts that women should learn "fortitude, prudence, humility, temperance, self-denial, perseverance, meekness, and industry",⁹⁷ in a word, utilitarian bourgeois virtues. By the way, it should be noted that More's model woman is middle-class: she is only "managing" and "supervising" the household while all the menial tasks are done supposedly by servants. Paradoxically, while trying to create an anti-luxury female image, More tacitly endorses the theory of conspicuous consumption which asserts that a woman's

⁹⁶ More, Works 397.

⁹⁷ More, Works 407.

respectability hinges on her staying away from menial labor. It should also be noted, incidentally, that although More tries her best to prepare women for the marriage-market, her model woman was not appreciated by all her contemporaries or successors. Byron refers to Coelebs's wife satirically in "Don Juan":

In short she was a walking calculation,
Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their
covers,
Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
Or "Coelebs' wife" set out in quest of lovers,
Morality's prim personification
In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers;
To others' share let "female errors fall,"
For she had not even one--the worst of all.

(1: 16)

4. More's views on literature and the arts

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, the attitude towards luxury sometimes finds its reflection in the attitude towards arts and literature. In More's attitude towards arts and literature we can see how the arts become one of More's tools of enhancing the status quo. On one hand, since More's aim of female education is to provide bourgeois men with wives who can help with the accumulation of capital, music, fine arts, the accomplishments of upper-

class young ladies which were in vogue in the eighteenth-century England and which are of no practical use are despised and dismissed from More's educational curriculum. The arts, according to More, can be effeminating (debilitating). In "On the Education of Women" she argues that the Roman women, in order to please the vitiated tastes of men, began to study every grace and every art, till at length the Roman character lost its integrity, and through a quick succession of slavery, effeminacy and vice, sank into degeneracy: "Those very arts which were the instruments of civilization and refinement, become instruments of corruption and decay; enervating and depraving in the second instance as certainly as they refined in the first. They become agents of voluptuousness."⁹⁸ Ironically, all of More's exemplary characters shun all kinds of activities related to the arts, as if their virtue were made of such frail stuff that it could stand no trial. Coelebs and Lucilla, the two moral paragons in Coelebs, never go to play or ball. On the other hand, More herself was a good friend of David Garrick, and her dramatic work Percy (1777) won recognition in London's theatrical circles. In an attempt to be consistent, when she republished all her plays in her Collected Works, More introduced them by a preface in which she denounced drama as "dissolving the heart with amatory

⁹⁸ More, Works 77-8.

scenes, warping the mind with corrupt reasoning, and inflaming the mind with seducing principles."⁹⁹

More's rejection of all but "useful" arts in general can be placed in the context of the contrasts between a "patriot" and "man of commerce," between "virtue" and "politeness" or "refinement" that emerged in the eighteenth-century as a ramification of the luxury controversy. J. A. Pocock points out that

The patriot's virtue--his autonomy and engagement--cannot well be questioned, so long as there exists a polis or republic in which it may be exercised: but it can be shown to have rested on an archaic and restrictive foundation. The ancient city existed in a world where neither commerce nor agriculture were properly developed, and for this reason, argues Montesquieu, the virtuous citizen was a slaveowner. His devotion to the laws of his city was characteristic of a world in which neither commerce nor culture--frequently bracketed as "the arts"--furnished social ties capable of holding men together and only the "stern paideia" (the phrase is Marvin Becker's) of civil discipline could perform the

⁹⁹ Hopkins 103.

task.¹⁰⁰

So for the purpose of consolidating the authoritarian state and promoting the patriot's virtue among the people, More had to reject the arts as an effeminating agent. It is also possible that DuBoscq's theory of harmful visual consumption could have some influence in shaping More's suggestion that it is better to read Shakespeare than to see it acted on the stage.¹⁰¹ She would have agreed, perhaps, with what DuBoscq asserts in "La femme héroïque ou les héroïnes comparées avec les héros, en toute sorte de vertus" that women's eyes are portals of entry, things are objects of visual consumption, sentiments are targets of seductive images, and perception is the conduit of corruption from the outside world to subjectivity.¹⁰² However, in her later years, More became interested in writing Sacred Dramas (a dramatization of the Biblical stories). Even Sarah Trimmer was impressed by the Sacred Dramas and compared them to the Scriptures.¹⁰³

More's attitude towards literature and the fine arts is also reflected in her treatment of children's literature.

¹⁰⁰ J. A. Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 114.

¹⁰¹ Meakin 401.

¹⁰² DuBoscq, quoted by Armstrong 102.

¹⁰³ Meakin 246.

In the eighteenth century children became the objects of luxury. J. H. Plumb points out that "Children, in a sense, had become luxury objects upon which their mothers and fathers were willing to spend larger and larger sums of money, not only for their education, but also for their entertainment and amusement."¹⁰⁴ According to Kramnick, in pre-industrial England, children's literature consisted of fable, folk and fairy tales only. In the late seventeenth century, English translations were made of Aesop's fables and Reynard the Fox. Perrault's fairy tales (1628-1703) were translated from the French in the eighteenth century, and several of them, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Red Riding Hood would, of course, later become staple fare in the nursery.¹⁰⁵ John Locke, it will be remembered, played a significant role in the evolution of children's literature. In Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) he points out that children should be taught to read books that dealt with their own world, not with imaginative other worlds. They should not be given books, "such as should fill their head with perfectly useless trumpery." In this category he placed fairies and fairy lore, superstition, books of

¹⁰⁴ J. H. Plumb, "The New World of Children," Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 310.

¹⁰⁵ Kramnick 213.

"goblins and spirits."¹⁰⁶

In all More's stories written for Sunday school children (and semi-literate adults as well), no such "useless trumpery" is included. On the contrary, an ideological message of bourgeois values, such as frugality and industry, is carefully and painstakingly inculcated. A brief glance at the stories would be illustrative enough: "The Shepherd of Salisbury-Plain" is a glorification of humble and pious poverty. The shepherd is hard-working, law-abiding, and he accepts his position in society without question. "Two Wealthy Farmers" is a paean to sobriety, frugality, and hard work, and a condemnation of vanity. "Tom White" teaches the doctrine of thrift and sensible managing, whereas in "The History of Tawny Rachel, the Fortune-teller" and "Black Giles, the Poacher" the laziness and greediness of the lower-class are scathingly ridiculed and satirized. In this way literature and the arts become More's tool of enhancing the status quo: her stories in Cheap Repository Tracts transform children's literature from a tool of entertainment into a tool for teaching bourgeois values.¹⁰⁷ Utilitarians, like Bentham, view literature and

¹⁰⁶ Kramnick 215.

¹⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that More's contemporary, Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), made similar attempts. Her children's stories, such as "The Little Merchants," "The Purple Jar," "Harry and Lucy," are dramatizations of bourgeois values, although whether More had any direct influence on Edgeworth is still an issue that remains to be explored.

art in a similar way: according to Bentham, art is valuable because it prevents people from causing mischief. In Deontology he talks about the importance of introducing arts "in as much as they constitute innocent employments . . . possess a species of moral utility . . . They are excellent substitutes for drunkenness, slander and the love of gaming."¹⁰⁸ In Bentham's view, the government should encourage music, theatre, clubs, public amusements, arts, sciences and literature as means of diverting anti-social desires into innocent pursuits. In particular, he suggests that the government should popularize the game of chess, because it diminishes ennui, the peculiar malady of the human race.

Perhaps by asserting that More's ideas of luxury and female education is utilitarian in principle I may incur strong critical disagreement, since the intellectual postulates of utilitarianism and evangelicalism are entirely different. But I think an exploration into this unknown territory of More criticism is particularly worthwhile since her lifetime covers a period during which the debate over luxury ran its course. The preoccupation with the relationship between material progress and moral decline that had characterized much of the century's social thought

¹⁰⁸ Parekh xxii.

had given way to an ever more pressing concern with individual well-being. By the end of the century, no one felt inhibited in promoting individual happiness as the summum bonum. The democratic draftsmen of the American constitution included the "pursuit of happiness" as one of the citizens' most cherished rights. The utilitarians began their search for that felicitous calculus which would lead to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Social philosophers, for the most part, accepted material progress as inevitable, and were concerned with how it might be extended to all sections of society.¹⁰⁹ Whether luxury has a positive or negative effect on morality became a less important issue. Thus the intrinsic worry about the effects of material wealth on moral well-being had subsided, and with it, the eighteenth-century female writers' concerns over luxury and female education, of which More's works can be regarded as the last word.

109 Jack 198-200.

Conclusion

In the 1980s there was a plethora of studies on Restoration and eighteenth-century women writers. At one end, one remembers Angeline Goreau's Reconstructing Aphra: a Social Biography of Aphra Behn (1980) which mapped out the problems with a male-dominated literary history. At the other there is Donna Landry's The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796 (1990), which showed us a different literary history. A few noteworthy works in between are Ruth Perry's Women, Letters and the Novel (1980), Felicity A. Nussbaum's The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750 (1984), and The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England (1989), and Ann Messenger's His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature (1986). The list can go on endlessly if we add the numerous articles dealing with the subject of eighteenth-century women writers in academic journals. These works provide us with theoretical insight into the literary works of eighteenth-century women. Even non-theoretical studies like Elizabeth Bergen Brothy's Women's Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel (1991) add to our knowledge of the period.

This study is intended to contribute to this growing awareness of eighteenth-century female writers, and

specifically of how gender is such a fundamental part of the eighteenth-century luxury debate. A passage from Genesis illustrates the rationale of my undertaking: "The Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Genesis 2: 19). In eighteenth-century male discourse men exert this naming power by depicting the female as Luxuria, one of the seven deadly sins. In spite of the fact that the literary expression of luxury and conspicuous consumption has been discussed by critics, little critical attention has been given to its treatment in the works of female prose writers. No sustained critical inquiry has been made on whether eighteenth-century women of letters accepted or challenged this image imposed on them. Hence it is necessary to examine what the eighteenth-century women's views towards luxury were and whether they concurred with the view of their male contemporaries that they were the embodiment of Luxuria.

The texts in this study, however, cannot claim in any simple way to be monolithic in their arguments on luxury. In fact it would be naive to assume that diverse literary texts all contain a single, unambiguous ideological position, since the complex structure of literary form and language constantly undermines and questions the validity of an all-inclusive interpretation. Even within the same text

the ideological positions of the same author can be ambiguous or even contradictory, because ideology itself, as Althusser claims, only "expresses a will, a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality."¹ It is coded into a discourse but not a discourse of description.² Yet, one can argue that the texts involved here delineate a line of ambivalent but essential resistance to the ideologies of their day.

Sarah Scott's A Description of Millenium Hall is unique in presenting a matriarchal utopian society as an ideal social model opposed to luxury and its potential subversiveness. It is an excellent example of how women writers adapted masculine forms such as the Utopia to express their distinctive perceptions and own concerns.³ In the history of world literature, there are many utopian writers, utopian literature is arguably masculine and gender-specific by nature, although Anne Mellor feels that

¹ Louis Althusser, For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969) 234.

² For a detailed enunciation of this theory of ideology and language, see Terry Eagleton, Ideology, an Introduction (London: Verso, 1991) 18-9.

³ Actually, this practice was more common among eighteenth-century women poets. For example, Mary Leapor and Anna Laetitia Barbauld employ the eighteenth-century idiom of mock heroic to celebrate tea-making and gossip. See "Introduction," The Meridian Anthology of Early Women Writers eds. Katharine M. Rogers and William McCarthy (New York and Scarborough: New American Library, 1987) xix.

feminist theory is inherently utopian, too.⁴ David Bleich points out,

. . . the Utopian fantasy will be understood as something peculiarly masculine, or gender-specific, and decidedly unfeminine, because of the imagery of Mother Earth or Mother Nature as perceived by all the (masculine) Utopianists being discussed. At various points in the discussion, we will take note of the masculine character of the Utopian fantasy.⁵

Of course, Bleich's argument is chiefly based on the psychoanalytic theory that the utopian fantasy stems from the rebellious spirit of the adolescent youth; the millenarian prophet acting as the big brother who was going to kill father and save all the children from his castrating wrath and establish the nurturing bliss of millenarian totality.⁶ So the idea of a female Utopia presented in A Description of Millenium Hall subverts the traditional sense of the relation between genre and gender.

Millenium Hall also subverts the myth created by

⁴ See Anne K. Mellor, "On Feminist Utopias," Women's Studies 3 (1982): 243.

⁵ David Bleich, Utopia: the Psychology of a Cultural Fantasy (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984) 3.

⁶ Bleich 17.

male ideology that women are symbols of conspicuous consumption. Millenium Hall is a luxury-free, totally self-contained female Utopia. It is also a projection of Scott's ideal of women's educational agenda: the education of women in supposedly masculine areas of expertise such as financial management in a society of capitalist production. However, all her fictionalized proposals are, to use the words of Ernst Bloch, "hopes placed in the inauthentic future," since she proposes no changes in the structure of the society from which she attempts to dissociate. Scott's vision of a female Utopia is only a modified version of the patriarchal and class-hierarchal society in which she lived.

Historically speaking, Millenium Hall has its pioneering significance as it anticipates later feminist utopian works, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, Joanna Russ's The Female Man, Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground and so on. It also serves as a blue-print for future political and social organization such as the Owenite socialist group. Moreover, Millenium Hall contains a critique of the patriarchal society which turns women into symbols of conspicuous consumption and argues the opposite by demonstrating that women are capable of becoming wise consumers and active producers.

My discussion of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is an attempt to look at an upper-class female's view of luxury. As a new world based on trade and industrial wealth was

coming into being, class conflict and nationalistic passion came to the fore. The luxury debate invariably leads to the question of whether luxury is justifiable in the interests of the national economy as well as ethically sound for national morality. Hirschman points out that "actually the general opinion on the effect of commerce on international discord or harmony changed substantially from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century."⁷ In this debate what stance Augustan women, especially the influential courtly women, took would be worth noticing. Lady Mary, because of her court connection with Walpole, is one of the few women who could have any influence on the national politics; thus she becomes an important figure in this debate.

Lady Mary's letters and essays on luxury are interrogative and open-ended. She was well aware of the connection between female consumption and Britain's national economy, and suggested that luxury on the part of upper-class women should be restricted to protect the English woollen industry. Yet at the same time she was all for the Mandevillian theory that private conspicuous consumption promotes public welfare. She supported the idea of an agrarian self-sufficient economy while she also defended the

⁷ Albert Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 79.

commercial interests of the rising bourgeoisie. Lady Mary's extensive travelling enabled her to view luxury from a cosmopolitan perspective, which surpasses the narrower puritan/bourgeois condemnation of conspicuous consumption. She was positive about the beneficial effect of luxury on the development of Islamic culture. The same binary vision also manifests itself in her views on class distinction, an issue usually connected with luxury in the eighteenth-century mind, as well as in her views on luxury and political virtues--which explains to some extent the ambivalence in her political allegiances. In her views on luxury and female education Lady Mary was still very much in submission to the ruling male ideology that women should conceal their learning in order to avoid hostility from the rest of society, despite her contention that men were responsible for women's commodification and consequent conspicuous consumption. Lady Mary's texts at times seem inconsistent, unconventional, autonomous--characteristics which suggest her difficulty with the unconditional acceptance of the dominant ideologies (gender-biased as well as class-biased) of her time.

Mary Wollstonecraft's ambivalence towards luxury and female education is, as I argued, inseparably related to the fact that she was enmeshed by an ideology that constantly defeats itself: the conflict between the class interests of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie's insight into the

nature of social relationships. As a liberal bourgeois humanist she was aware of the dehumanizing effect of mechanical civilization upon social mores, and she yearned for a return to the prelapsarian state of society. Yet her allegiance to the economic interests of her class would not allow her to embrace primitivism either. The same wavering attitude manifested itself in her views on the issues associated with luxury, such as the class system, the system of property distribution and charity. On the issue of female education, she cannot envisage fundamental change in the roles ascribed to women by patriarchal ideology, although she had strong objections to the ornamental image of women created by men. The inconsistency and self-contradiction in Wollstonecraft's views on luxury and its relation to female education are symptomatic of the dilemma faced by bourgeois women during the period of rising industrial capitalism--how to reidentify their roles within the boundary of the ideological, political and economical interests of their class.

I should also point out that by using Lukács's theory of the ideological dialectics in the bourgeoisie and fitting Wollstonecraft into that theoretical framework, I may raise the suspicion of being a class-reductionist myself. I am aware of the gender determinants in Wollstonecraft; I think that the wavering attitude of Wollstonecraft towards luxury cannot be manifested in the

same way by a male. The Wollstonecraft who has been properly redeemed by feminist critics is also the bourgeois woman who was anxious to maintain the status quo, to defend the interests of her class.

Hannah More's views on luxury are noteworthy for various reasons. First, she has incorporated the subject of luxury in late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century children's literature. Since the role of middle-class women in the eighteenth century was chiefly the bearing and rearing of children, teaching the correct attitude towards luxury was their exclusive responsibility. This is a new way of viewing the luxury debate, and one that has not been commonly recognized by More's male contemporaries.⁸ Secondly, there are similarities and distinct differences between her and the other contemporary or close to contemporary female writers discussed here (Sarah Scott was a little earlier than More). It would be illustrative to compare them so that a balanced picture can be restored. More is sometimes considered as diametrically opposed to Wollstonecraft. However, in terms of their views on luxury

⁸ However, John Newberry's The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes (1765) and Thomas Day's Sandford and Merton (1780) do contain doctrines of puritan ethics which are more or less related to luxury. See Issac Kramnick, "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Observations on Culture and Industrial Capitalism in the Later Eighteenth Century," Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to the Enlightenment, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 203-37.

and the literary ways they sought to express these views, they were congenial in spirit. Less obvious yet more revealing is the comparison between More and Sarah Scott. Both were genuinely concerned about the moral depravity and luxury in society; both took the "moralist" stance; both advocated Protestant ethics and relied on religious faith as an effective way of combating luxury and its related vices. More and Scott attacked idleness and luxury while praising thrift, self-denial, simplicity, productivity and usefulness. Yet the ways to virtuous living are seen in entirely different lights by these two women. For Scott, the hope of salvation lies in the establishing of a female Utopia. For More, it is more important to "live in the world" and reform it rather than escaping from it.

Thirdly, More is also worth investigating because her works serve as a transitional point in the intellectual history of the luxury debate. There is perceptible affinity between what More asserts and the later Benthamite utilitarianism. It may be objected that I call too much attention to their affinities, rather than to their differences. My argument for doing so is that, since the affinities between them has been generally neglected, they need some attention.

The gaps and textual dissonances in Hannah More's works regarding luxury and female education are symptoms of the "pas dire," the suppressed historical necessity of

More's time, that is, the consumer revolution. According to Neil McKendrick, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century the consumer boom reached revolutionary proportions. Arthur Young in 1771 called this boom "UNIVERSAL" luxury, and Dibden in 1801 described "the prevailing opulence of all classes."⁹ The intellectual and moral recognition of the economic advantages of this consumer boom was necessary to prepare society for this revolution. However, as Max Weber points out, Puritanism adopts an entirely negative attitude to sensuous culture of all kinds.¹⁰ The gaps and dissonance in More's texts reflect the ideological justification of capitalism that More attempts to incorporate, or to adapt, in her advocacy of evangelicalist teachings. Hence it bears remarkable affinity to another important school of thinking--utilitarianism, a spiritual child of capitalism.

The four women writers I discuss all viewed luxury from different perspectives. But there are several features in common. First, there are contradictions, discrepancies and inconsistencies that their works display but do not attempt to address or resolve. The discrepancies often

⁹ quoted by Neil McKendrick, "Commercialization and the Economy," The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 9.

¹⁰ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1930) 105.

involve disruptions of ideological unity. To return to Pierre Macherey's theory, the significance of a text lies in what the text cannot say, in a word, what the ideology of the day will not let it say. The subtext hidden underneath all these unsaid and unsolved discrepancies is worth our attention. According to French feminists like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Marguerite Duras, in a patriarchal society, when women speak, they cannot help entering male-dominated discourse and they speak like men. Yet the discontent keeps surfacing.¹¹ All the ambiguities and textual dissonances within the texts I am dealing with suggest that these women were reacting to the dominant patriarchal ideology within heterogeneous discourse, even though they were not necessarily "feminists" themselves.¹² Also, these contradictions and dissonances indicate the difficulties they encountered in achieving a compromise between their visions of progressive humanism (in a general broad sense only, as the women writers I discuss had various specific arguments) and their own class interests.

¹¹ Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l'écriture feminine," Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture eds. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York and London: Methuen, 1985) 86-98.

¹² Rita Felski contends that "it is difficult to draw a clear line separating the 'feminist' text from any 'woman-centred' narrative with a female protagonist." See Rita Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989) 13-4.

The second feature is that internally, these women's works create a gender-specific identity in the luxury debate as they are dealing with special concerns of women. Lady Mary's arguments, ambiguous as they are, indicate her objection to the dominant male ideology that females are symbols of conspicuous consumption. In the Nonsense of Common-Sense she refers to herself as one who is "glad they can find in the imaginary Empire of Beauty, a consolation for being excluded from every part of Government in the State." As Harriet Guest observes, this double-edged remark suggests that beautiful feminine display is a form of worthless conspicuousness, and the allusion to consolation seems to emphasize that the significance of this "imaginary Empire" cannot be dismissed out of hand, one must acknowledge its quasi-political or ceremonial function.¹³ The protest against women's trivialization is self-evident in this seemingly simple statement. As I argue above, the ambivalence in Lady Mary's views towards retirement also suggests her distinctive difference from her contemporary male's view regarding feminine visibility, as represented by John Brown.

There is a gender-specific identity in A Description of Millenium Hall, as the novel deals with the issues of

¹³ Harriet Guest, "A Double Lustre: Femininity and Sociable Commerce, 1730-60," Eighteenth-Century Studies 4 (1990): 484.

economy and education in an autonomous female utopian community. Yet, as I pointed out above, this "feminist" utopian model is highly ambivalent in terms of its social formation, economic structure and ideological systems. The road Scott mapped out is more reformist than revolutionary. It presages the reactionary path the eighteenth-century Bluestocking movement eventually took.

The feminine identity reveals itself in Mary Wollstonecraft's views on luxury with special reference to women. By focusing on the issue and image of female sexual conduct in Maria, Wollstonecraft questions the economic and political integrity of the dominant male ideology. Yet it remains unclear to what extent she thought women constituted a relatively autonomous element of the social formation. Wollstonecraft's ideological wavering can be placed in a historical context. The ideology of a woman's sphere was only established at a time when industrial capitalism was beset both by economic crisis and by working-class unrest, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s,¹⁴ some thirty years after her death. So Wollstonecraft's vision transcended her age, but only to a limited degree.

The gender-specific identity in Hannah More's texts on luxury is manifested in her advocacy of domestic reform.

¹⁴ Judith Lowder Newton, Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860 (New York and London: Methuen, 1985) 19.

Although in More's time both male and female writers explored this woman's issue and called for "a revolution in female manners," women, according to Mitzi Myers, "maneuvered the issue with an adroit and ambitious mastery which far outstrips the simplistic hysteria of . . . male reactionaries."¹⁵ However, the gaps and textual dissonances in More's views towards luxury suggest that her model of evangelical femininity is only a "strategy of containment" which smokescreens its inadequacy in an age that cries for material accumulation as well as material well-being.

The third feature is that externally, these female texts express a desire to convince society as a whole of the validity of the feminist claim--that women should not be treated trivially and should be given adequate education so that they can be moral reformers. This desire can be viewed as resistance to the dominant ideology that the educational purpose for women was to make them ornamental. Lady Mary pointed out that if women were properly educated, they would find more pleasure in learning rather than in the pursuit of luxury, and she blamed men for trivializing women. Scott's idea of female education was more active and more independence-oriented than Lady Mary's. In her Millenium Hall, women are trained to be producers and wise managers of

¹⁵ Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: 'a Revolution in Female Manners,'" Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 11 (1982): 200.

material wealth. The male-created female image of mindless, decorative consumers is totally discredited. Unlike Scott, whose idea of independent women could only be realized in a fictional utopian world isolated from reality, Wollstonecraft's idea of female education aims at preparing women for useful roles in actual society--musicians, nurses, midwives, politicians and businesswomen, although she envisioned women primarily as dutiful wives and mothers. More subverts the dominant male philosophy of female education by contending that women, if properly educated, possess a domestic usefulness that has a social and political resonance. ". . . every man of sense must humbly bow before woman. She bears the sway, not man as he presumptuously supposes."¹⁶ Since, according to More, the foundations of national morality were laid in private families, proper female education had immediate influence on social stability and the welfare of the whole nation.

The fourth feature is that these women all speak from the position of a class-specific femininity. Although it is too generalizing to label them with the vague term "middle-class," their "feminist" stands fall into certain class categories: Lady Mary wavered between the interests of the landed gentry and that of the rising bourgeoisie. Scott

¹⁶ quoted from Nancy F. Cott, The Bounds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977) 99.

firmly adhered to the class hierarchy of her time, and believed that only middle-class women could successfully undertake the rebuilding of a quasi-socialist Utopia. Wollstonecraft was caught between the interests of rising capitalism and liberal democratic feminism. More struggled between the new capitalist ethics (such as utilitarianism) and the conservatism of her time, meanwhile maintaining her allegiance to the status quo of the class hierarchy and the material distribution system. This position of class-specific femininity explains, to some degree (though it is dangerous to generalize), their limited visions of women's emancipation.

To go back to Althusser, we must say that ideology is not a simple mechanical reflection of a determining economic base. Rather, ideology is a practice that enjoys relative autonomy. It would not be helpful if we placed too much emphasis on the economic base that shaped these women's ideas on luxury (although in the final analysis, the economic base plays its crucial determining role). Nor would it give us much insight into the issue if we simplistically conceptualized their every notion along the lines of gender distinction, a practice which seems to me deplorably ahistorical. (Some people, like Kate Millett, for example, tend to feel that ideology is monolithic: "ideology becomes a monolithic unified totality that knows no contradictions; against this a miraculously intact

'femaleness' may pit its strength."¹⁷) To borrow Raymond Williams's concept, though he is chiefly referring to the relation between the dominant social institution and the leeway it allows for alternative acts,

However dominant a social system may be, the very meaning of its domination involves a limitation or selection of the activities it covers, so that by definition it cannot exhaust all social experience, which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project.¹⁸

I contend that the women I discussed should not be viewed solely in terms of their class and gender; rather, the economic and social contradictions in which these women faced, as well as their individual experiences should be studied in order to understand fully the ideologies they propounded. Furthermore, in the words of Terry Eagleton, "it is not necessarily true by any means that the works of the same author will belong to the same ideology. Even

¹⁷ See Toril Moi's discussion in Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985) 63.

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review (London: New Left Books, 1979) 252.

texts which do belong to the same ideology will not 'give' it in the same way."¹⁹ This recognition suggests to us that as realistic literary texts (the texts involved in this dissertation can be categorized broadly as "realistic" even though Millennium Hall is set in a utopian framework), these women's works generate an inexhaustible supply of historically complex readings. Colin MacCabe, my former instructor in China, asserts with disparagement, that realism is a closed form which imposes a single and transparent meaning. (In his almost enigmatic passage MacCabe argues, "The classic realist text cannot deal with the real in its contradiction because of the unquestioned status of the representation at the level of the dominant discourse." In a word, he thinks that realism does not truly reflect reality.²⁰) The textual richness (ambiguities, dissonances) of these female works invites our further exploration that far surpasses any one-dimensional interpretations.

This study has culminated in the attempt to examine and gain insight into the way some eighteenth-century women

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: a Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: NLB 1976) 97.

²⁰ Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," Screen 2 (1974): 16. It is still arguable among the British academia that Cambridge University terminated MacCabe's employment on the ground of his theoretical stand. But the story is not pertinent here.

viewed luxury and themselves. It does not pretend to be a history of so general an issue as women and luxury.

Although towards the end of the eighteenth century the urgency of the luxury debate subsided, the concerns for women's image as a consumer and for female education were still growing, and they merit our attention.²¹ But that is the topic of another thesis.

²¹ Erika Rappaport discusses the image of female as a consumer in the nineteenth century in her paper, "'Sherry and Silks': The Promotion of Women's Pleasure in London's West End, 1872-1914," presented at Victorian Space and Place: 18th Annual Meeting of the Northeast Victorian Studies Association.

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