

“TILL SOCIETY BE DIFFERENTLY CONSTITUTED, MUCH CANNOT BE EXPECTED
FROM EDUCATION”: FEMINIST IMAGININGS OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND
EDUCATION IN WOLLSTONECRAFT, HAYS, ROBINSON, AND THELWALL

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi’kma’ki,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the radical writers of which it focuses on. Without their influential writings our theorizing on feminism, women's rights, education, and independence would be incomplete.

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Abstract

This project elucidates the connection between the philosophical treatises written by Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, and John Thelwall in the 1790s advocating women's rights and education and Wollstonecraft's, Hays', and Thelwall's fictional imaginings of these possibilities in their novels. Through the fictional narratives of the female Bildungsroman genre, or the novel of education, these authors were able to imagine the possibilities discussed in the philosophical treatises of women's education and rights within a patriarchal society. These imagined possibilities of an androgynous education and women's emancipation envision educated women who can discuss philosophically and argue their own beliefs and place in patriarchal society. Through tracing each heroine's formal and self-education journey, I will assess to what extent they are able to accomplish their goal of reforming patriarchal society through the reformation of the family.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

On January 22, 1797, four radical philosophers met at the home of William Godwin: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, and John Thelwall. While we do not know what they discussed, it is probable, based on their writings and philosophical alignment, that it included women's rights and education. The four did not always meet as a group, but, as is recorded in Godwin's diary entries, they would continue to meet frequently until Wollstonecraft's death in 1797 (*William Godwin Diaries*).¹ Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson wrote philosophical treatises advocating for a more expansive education for women. Their writings argued for female independence from men, without disrupting women's traditionally conceived responsibilities as mothers and wives. For them, education represented an end to women's "slavish dependence" without dismantling the patriarchal order of society they wished to be included in (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 25). Similarly, Thelwall wrote treatises advocating a greater education for all members of society without focusing specifically on women. However, political treatises were not accessible to all; fiction helped disseminate the message to a greater, predominantly female, readership (Golightly 8). Through the fictional narratives of the female Bildungsroman genre, or the novel of education, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall were able to imagine the possibilities discussed in the philosophical treatises of women's education and rights within a patriarchal society.² My project will first examine the philosophical treatises as they provide the framework and language necessary to understand the

¹ Following Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin's diary references meetings with Hays (up until 1818), Robinson (until her death in 1800), and Thelwall (until his death in 1834) but the three never met again as a group after Wollstonecraft's death.

² Robinson also wrote novels advocating women's rights and education, see *Walsingham* (1797) and *The Natural Daughter* (1799).

fictional narratives. Through understanding the social, historical, and philosophical reasoning present in the treatises, I will compare these accounts to the fictional narratives which argue the need for women's education and imagine possible scenarios that realize those arguments found in the treatises. These imagined possibilities of an androgynous education and women's emancipation envision educated women who can discuss philosophically and argue their own beliefs and place in patriarchal society. I will examine how the narratives of Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall represent women as strong, intelligent, and independent as a result of their education, and able to challenge the patriarchal social norms which mandate their relationship to knowledge.

It is first necessary to provide the historical, political, and philosophical background writers at the end of the eighteenth century found themselves in. At the end of the eighteenth century, there was a surge of philosophical and political writings surrounding what would come in the nineteenth century to be considered the "woman question," or the debate on women's mental and physical abilities. These political writings were largely influenced by the French Revolution (1789-1799) (Markley 1) and the debates over human rights that accompanied it. As a result, "political thinkers in Britain who shared the conviction that social and political change were needed in their own country began to be called 'Jacobins,'³ a misnomer borrowed from a political group in France" (Markley 1). The hopeful revolutionary spirit of the French Revolution turned to one of fear and anxiety in 1793 with the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (Golightly 9). Even before the Revolution became the Reign of Terror, the British government,

³ There is some debate on the use of the term "Jacobin" to refer to the radical authors in the 1790's. See Arnold A. Markley's *Conversion and Reform in the British Novels of the 1790's: A Revolution of Opinions*, Jennifer Golightly's *The Family, Marriage, and Radicalism in British Women's Novels of the 1790's: Public Affection and Private Affliction*, and Nancy E. Johnson's *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and Law: Critiquing the Contract*.

afraid that ideas of rights and equality would spread, cracked down upon British reformers in what Johnston has called a “Reign of Alarm” (xv). Loyal citizens, anxious that the mass violence in France would spread to their own communities, also pushed back against the ideals expressed by radical English writers as the French Revolution came to be viewed as “something ugly, monstrous, and unstoppable” (Golightly 10).

While the range of opinion among members of the radical movement of the 1790s was diverse, its members knew one another well, particularly in London. Wollstonecraft, Hays, Robinson, and Thelwall were associated with each other through their relationship with Godwin, but also through other equally reformist individuals involved in the printing and publication of their work, such as Joseph Johnson, publisher of *The Analytical Review* (1788-1799), and Richard Phillips, publisher of the *Monthly Magazine* (1796-1825) (Golightly 8). However, authors who contested the writings of radical thinkers, such as the loyalist anti-Jacobins, began a counter-attack directed at the radical novelists (Golightly 10). Loyalist publishing platforms, such as the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (1798-1821), published scathing critiques of Wollstonecraft, Hays, Robinson, and Thelwall, which, in combination with the growing anxiety and social attitudes of the 1790’s, created an atmosphere designed to suppress reformist writers (Golightly 9). The criticism directed at women was particularly harsh, as Wollstonecraft and her fellow women writers were branded by *The Anti-Jacobin Review* as the “legion of Wollstonecrafts” (qtd. in Setzer 324), a defamatory term which references the Biblical Mark 5:1-3 passage in which Jesus must “cast out” a spirit which calls itself “Legion: for we are many” (Setzer 325).

Writers of political treatises focused their argument on the natural “rights of man.” These rights were not extended to women, creating a gap writers such as Wollstonecraft, Hays, and

Robinson wished to fill by arguing that, as women were created in the image of God/man: “either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial” (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 23). The authority of the patriarchy in deciding whom should be granted “natural rights” is critiqued in these feminist writings. Even though writers such as Godwin and Thelwall would include women in advocating that rights be granted to the lower classes, issues pertaining specifically to women were not addressed in these treatises. Women advocating for the patriarchal recognition of their own inalienable rights would, like Wollstonecraft, use religion as the foundation for women’s similarity to men to argue that they be extended to them: “[y]et it should seem, allowing [women] to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by Providence to lead *mankind* to either virtue or happiness” (*A Vindication* 36).

Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was a response to conservative political thinker Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (Golightly 7).⁴ In *A Vindication*, Wollstonecraft argues for an end to female subjugation and for female independence. She was greatly influenced by Catharine Macaulay, whose *Letters on Education* (1790) Wollstonecraft expands upon (Richardson 175). An emphasis is placed on the quality of education by arguing that the subjugation of women was a fault in their education, and not an inherit deficit in mental capacities:

the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire -- mere propagators of fools!-- ... in aiming to accomplish them, without cultivating their

⁴ Wollstonecraft previously published *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790) which was a direct response to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, but it did not explicitly deal with the particular experiences and oppression women faced.

understandings, they are taken out of their sphere of duties, and made ridiculous and useless when the short-lived bloom of beauty is over. (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 27)

Women's formal education catered primarily to their physical attributes and modesty, subjects which were developed and circulated in eighteenth-century women's conduct books (Richardson 172)⁵ where women were "taught to please, and they only live to please" (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 41) with a "spaniel-like affection" (52). Wollstonecraft targets female conduct books and education, as she expresses that the "most perfect education" is one which will render the individual independent (*A Vindication* 38). Female subjugation through a lack of education renders them the "slaves" of men. On the contrary, she argues: "[s]trengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 42). Critically, she asks, "[w]here is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same? All the difference that I can discern, arises from the superior advantage of liberty, which enables [men] to see more of life" (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 41). While she does advocate for unmarried women to be able to support themselves respectably (180-2), Wollstonecraft finds her argument on education providing women with a greater ability to fulfil the domestic responsibilities of wives and mothers: "the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband" (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 47). Wollstonecraft's focus is on providing women with the ability to properly educate their children and to be the companions, not slaves and dependents, of their husband so as to influence change from their position of partners and parents from within established patriarchal society.

⁵ Wollstonecraft wrote her own conduct book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life* in 1787 which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Like Wollstonecraft, Hays also wrote a philosophical treatise, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* (1798), in which she advocates women's independence through education. Hays and Wollstonecraft were close friends, meeting frequently in 1796 and 1797 prior to Wollstonecraft's death (*William Godwin Diaries*). Their meetings no doubt encouraged Hays' philosophical thinking towards women and a genderless education. However, unlike Wollstonecraft, Hays does not argue that women's education is beneficial for them to become better mothers and wives (*Appeal* 80-3). Instead, Hays proposes a gradual program of reform, in which women would not be granted total independence all at once, but as they prove themselves capable of acting independently (*Appeal* 107). Hays' argument is not as radically feminist as Wollstonecraft's but is perhaps better suited to the political and social climate in which it was produced.

A year after Hays' *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799) was published. Robinson's work is the most rhetorically radical, as her thinking "bec[ame] more radical as the 1790s progressed" (Markley 9). Robinson draws heavily on Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*, as like the philosophical women writers before her, she argues for women's independence through an androgynous education. Unlike Macaulay, Wollstonecraft, or Hays, Robinson focuses *A Letter* on women's ability to defend themselves, as women "by a barbarous policy, [are] denied the power to assert the first of Nature's rights, self-preservation" (Robinson 44). She provides examples like the story of a woman who resists her fiancé's attempt to compromise her virginity (Robinson 50-2). The woman "threw him a pistol, holding another in her right hand," as she engages in a duel for her honour, a masculine trope popular in the eighteenth century (Robinson 50). In Robinson's retelling, the heroine is able to defend herself as "she fired upon him, and shot him through the heart" (Robinson 51). Even

more radically given the oppressive institutions in place during the eighteenth century, the woman is believed when she explains the action as a defense of her honour (Robinson 51). Through narrating the importance of female self-defense, Robinson illustrates the compromising positions women found themselves: “HERE woman is placed in the very front of peril, without being allowed the means of self-preservation, and that very resistance which would secure her from dishonour, would stigmatize her in the world’s opinion” (Robinson 52).

Like Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Robinson, Thelwall also wrote philosophical treatises arguing that an inclusive education be granted to all members of society, regardless of gender. Although Thelwall was more interested in social class than gender and especially granting the lower classes greater political mobility, his definition of class is inclusive of women. Thelwall’s conception of rights was influenced by “the groundbreaking ideas” of the women writers he was associated with (Diachyshyn 18) and he drew from their ideals in the creation of his political treatise *The Rights of Nature* (1797). Like Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication, Rights of Nature* is a response to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which Burke contends that only the educated elite deserve the right to political education and action. In contrast, Thelwall’s *Rights of Nature* argues the rights of all, men, women, and children, to an androgynous education:

I, indeed, affirm (and I shall argue the right hereafter) that every man, and every woman, and every child, ought to obtain something more, in the general distribution of the fruits of labour, than food, and rags, and a wretched hammock ... They have a claim, a sacred and inviolable claim ... to some ‘tolerable leisure for such discussion, and some means of such information,’ as may lead to an understanding of their rights; without which they can never understand their duties.” (Thelwall, *Rights of Nature* 16)

In his political writing, Thelwall uses the male pronoun almost exclusively; however, his views on education are egalitarian.⁶ Thelwall's consideration of education is that "the diffusion of knowledge" will "promot[e] human liberty" (*Rights of Nature* 19), an argument which is shared by women philosophical writers as well. While Thelwall does not include women specifically, he would have been what Chernock terms an "egalitarian" (38) sympathetic to the feminist cause, "willing to contemplate, if not actively embrace, a brave new world in which sexual differences might be significantly diminished" (qtd. in Diachyshyn 22). Thelwall's work with human rights encouraged women's rights and participation in the rights movement to "free the tongues of those restricted by physical, moral, social, and, by proxy, political impediments" (Diachyshyn 28) in order to grant them the space necessary to advocate their beliefs and place in patriarchal society.

Whereas philosophical and political treatises conveyed the need for a recognition of women's rights and education, through fictional narratives authors such as Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall were able to communicate their own imaginings of what independent and enfranchised women might represent. Through narrating the heroines' struggles under oppressive societal constraints, authors were able to exemplify the "devastating effect of 'inherited rights' on dependents" (Johnson 20). By exploring the oppressive means of subjugating women through "family, marriage, sexuality, and motherhood," reformist authors endeavored to elucidate these conditions which women faced (Golightly 5-6). The novel thus became a "didactic force" (Johnson 13) through which radical authors could propose possible scenarios relating to women's rights and education through the mode of fiction "by revealing the realities of material conditions and placing them against visions of alternate possibilities" (Johnson 12). By choosing

⁶ See Mark Diachyshyn's thesis "'Their Voice is Music to my Ear': The Role of Women in the Work of John Thelwall" for a detailed analysis on Thelwall's views on androgynous education.

a less politically radical genre considered to be for women and the lower classes, novelists were able to propose more overtly feminist and radical ideas (Golightly 8).

Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall use the narrative genre of the female Bildungsroman to advocate women's rights and education. The Bildungsroman follows a character's psychological journey to maturity as they "striv[e] to reconcile individual aspirations and the demands of societal conformity" (Graham 1).⁷ By exploring the heroine's formal education in relation to self-education, they are able to express the failings of an education that does not prepare women for their entrance into society and advocate for a greater, androgynous education through the heroine's experiences and attempts to reform society through marriage. Women's formal education prepared for

a young lady's entrance into society and thus into experience. Usually, this experience is gained through the rituals of an awkward courtship; the culmination of a young lady's education in worldliness is her marriage to a worthy man, an event that closes the novel and, presumably, the young lady's social career. (Golightly 23)

However, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall believed, through their heroines' attempts to support themselves independently and develop healthy marriages, that women's formal education alone was not sufficient:

rather than showing this education as a tool through which the heroine assumed her place in society and learned the conventions by which she was expected to conduct herself, the female radical novelists showed this education as hypercritical and self-denying -- it is one against which the radical heroines struggle. (Golightly 23)

⁷ For a detailed explanation of the development of the Bildungsroman genre, see Sarah Graham's *A History of the Bildungsroman*.

By narrating the struggles women faced in the eighteenth century through the female Bildungsroman genre, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall hoped that readers, by connecting with the heroines and their experiences, would act to right these injustices.

Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall drew from personal experiences and philosophical treatises when creating their novels. Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798) is a continuation of her argument in *A Vindication* and was also influenced by Thelwall's *Rights of Nature*. When Maria leaves her marriage following her husband's infidelity, unable to support herself or receive aid, she is imprisoned by her husband. While Maria's imprisonment represents patriarchal control over women's bodies, Wollstonecraft subverts this status insofar as, while imprisoned, Maria is able to educate herself by discussing matters of philosophy and women's rights with her female jailer and male fellow-prisoner, and they imagine an egalitarian society for both men and women. Hays, in conversation with Godwin, was prompted to turn her own personal experiences of oppression into the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). Emma's formal education affects her ability to form realistic romantic relationships, while her self-education, through reading novels in her father's library, includes instances where she listens and actively engages in political and philosophical debates, which enlightens her thinking and her capacity to discuss philosophically and understand her position in patriarchal society as a woman.

Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption* (1801) is based on Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*, with the heroine, Seraphina, modeled after Wollstonecraft herself. Seraphina represents Wollstonecraft's envisioning of an androgynous education, and her refusal to adhere to societal and institutional norms allows Thelwall to envision the most fully realized reformation of the patriarchy from within the existing familial structure in relation to women's rights and education.

In order to study how each novel imagines women's education, independence, and the reformation of the patriarchy, I will work through the novels chronologically. I will begin with the heroines' formal education, before moving on to explore their self-education, and finally, in the last chapter, I will examine how the heroines utilize their androgynous education to inspire societal change through the reformation of the family by analysing the endings of the texts. In the second chapter I will continue to explore the historical, political, and philosophical climate which reinforced patriarchal social norms that mandated women's relationship to knowledge. Through the focus on early childhood experiences with knowledge, conduct book literature, and the philosophical treatises of Locke and Rousseau, I will assess the authors' responses to women's traditional, formal education. In the third chapter I will focus on women's self-education. By reading philosophical texts reserved for a "masculine" education, they are able to analyse social relations and realize their oppression by society. Through their ability to discuss with other characters in the texts, both male and female, they are able to engage in many of the political and philosophical discussions surrounding women's rights and education popular in the 1790s when the texts were composed. In the final chapter, I will compare the endings of the novels to assess to what extent the heroines are able, through their androgynous education, to influence social change. Through examining Emma's, Maria's, and Seraphina's androgynous education and the imagined possibilities available and denied them, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall are able to advocate and provide examples of the possibilities available to women through an androgynous education.

Chapter 2 Formal Education

Education in the Romantic period was largely influenced by Enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that “children were innocent and that the impressions and environmental influences of their early years shaped them for adulthood” (Simonton 34). Rousseau’s influential novel *Emile* (1762) details the education of a young boy from childhood to maturity through a series of discussions with his tutor. Rousseau and Locke establish, through their philosophical treatises and Rousseau’s novel *Emile*, the traditional, accepted education that children should receive: an education that reformist writers such as Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall would contest and rebel against. These authors use the Bildungsroman genre to advocate an androgynous education for their heroines and utilize the language and theory established in Rousseau’s *Emile* and the philosophical treatises to express the need for a natural education that cultivates virtue, an essential component of eighteenth-century formal education. Rousseau’s character Sophie in *Emile* represents the traditional formal female education that Rousseau, and many conservative thinkers like him, believed women should receive. Rousseau’s characterization of Sophie, coupled with the literature found in conduct books, prompted reformist writers to respond with their own novels and treatises arguing that women should receive a more expansive, genderless, education (Halsey par. 4). The ideology permeating the Bildungsroman novels of the 1790s is that “education is fate, and the advantages and mistakes of the hero’s education (which usually takes place outside of schools) are carefully delineated” (Richardson 7). Education in the 1790s was gendered, with boys receiving a more expansive education than girls: “The fundamental view was that nature had created men and women differently, each with his or her unique role. Since the female mind could be shown to be unlike the male mind in quality and character, it followed naturally that

women's education should be different in content as well as essence" (Simonton 35).

Wollstonecraft's Maria, Hays' Emma, and Thelwall's Seraphina are each affected by their early experiences and formal education, as the three authors interact with the ideas of Locke and Rousseau to engage in the philosophical debate surrounding education at the end of the eighteenth century.

Rousseau's male protagonist, Emile, represents what philosophers such as Rousseau and Locke believed to be the "natural" position of the child as "not simply innocent but ... invested with organic principles of growth that can either be fostered or distorted by socialization" (Richardson 11). Likewise, Locke, in his treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), views children as "white Paper," placing emphasis on early childhood experiences as forming children's behaviour and morals (Locke qtd. in Richardson 12). Locke advocates an education that caters to both the child's power of reasoning "as rational creatures" and their ability to engage in imaginative or creative play (Locke qtd. in Richardson 48). That educators should supervise children's learning is emphasized in both Locke and Rousseau, so that "[h]abits woven into the very Principles of Nature" may be internalized (Locke qtd. in Richardson 48).

Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall all incorporate Rousseau's and Locke's theorizing on the importance of imaginative play in their narratives. Hays has Emma engage in imaginative play in nature: "[t]hus, for the first twelve years of my life, fledged my days in joy and innocence. I ran like the hind, frisked like the kid, sang like the lark, was full of vivacity, health, and animation" (*Memoirs* 49). Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication* also argues that childhood should be "passed in harmless gambols" (153), an experience Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman* uses in her letter to her daughter, as she sanguinely reflects on "the varying charms of nature" as "the first sentiment I recollect ... the first consciousness of pleasure" (210). Though in *A Vindication*

Wollstonecraft would adamantly disagree with Rousseau on education and sensibility, she here illustrates the importance of nature and “imaginative play” (Locke qtd. in Richardson 48) in the development of young minds. The solitude of Seraphina’s early childhood experiences in the “then neglected spot” of St. Domingo “whose beautiful and romantic scenery is an inexhaustible source of contemplation and delights” is also emphasized as ““month sometimes succeeds to month without our having conversed with a single soul beyond our own family”” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 149). Parkinson, Seraphina’s adopted father, educates Seraphina privately as the beliefs and instruction he provides her are not compatible with the ideals of the general population, as Seraphina is described “as a sort of phenomenon -- a literary Creole -- a female philosopher” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 152).

With the eighteenth century came a greater concern about children’s conduct and rules regulating their behaviour and early experiences which Plumb optimistically calls a “new world of children” (qtd. in Richardson 8-9). Writers who wished to convey their thoughts on education used the popular medium of the conduct book in an attempt to educate parents on the “proper” education their child should receive. Zaczek writes of conduct books that they ““attempt to solve the conflict between a real life and an ideal’ being ‘designed to replace the existing set of values with a new one and turn the reality into the desired model”” (qtd. in Halsey par. 3). Conduct books typically focused on

the relative value of public or private education; the dubious value of ornamental ‘accomplishments;’ the role and purpose of reading; the dangers of excessive emotions or ‘feeling;’ ‘free-thinking’ versus religious authority; the role of reason in religion ... [and] the proper occupations for women. (Halsey par. 3)

Popular conduct books for women, such as James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) and John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), advocate female delicacy and obedience from a position of paternal care and sympathy, as Gregory wrote his book for his daughters following his wife's death (Mellor and Chao 123). Both men were viewed as sympathetic, paternal figures, and their books were widely read and well received. But both Fordyce's and Gregory's conduct books would become targets in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*, in which she writes of Fordyce's books: "I should not allow girls to peruse them, unless I designed to hunt every spark of nature out of their composition, melting every human quality into female meekness and artificial grace" (119). Wollstonecraft wrote her own conduct book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), based on her experiences as a school teacher (Faubert 18). Far less radical than her political treatise, *A Vindication, Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* focuses primarily on girls acquiring virtue in addition to exterior accomplishments. She writes of girls and reason: "she who suffers herself to be seen as she really is, can never be thought affected ... her endeavor is not to hide; but correct her failings, and her face has of course that beauty, which an attention to the mind only gives" (Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 32-3). Wollstonecraft advocates the development of active reasoning, which distinguishes her conduct book from others as she develops her ideas concerning women's intellectual growth and education which she would expand upon in *A Vindication*.

Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall all had experience either running or teaching schools which informed their philosophical and fictional writings on women and education.

Wollstonecraft first taught at Islington in 1784 "which failed in immediate terms" before establishing a school with her two sisters and her friend, Fanny Blood, at Newington Green that same year (Faubert 16). After Fanny's death, Wollstonecraft was forced to close her school;

however, her experiences at both Islington and Newington Green would provide her with the materials necessary to write her conduct book, and likely motivated her feminist thinking towards the creation of her treatises and two novels (Faubert 18). Although Hays was not involved with schools until after the publication of *Emma Courtney*, her friendship with Wollstonecraft anticipated her own ideas on education. Hays also ran a school at Islington from 1803-7, where she raised her nieces following her sister's death (Brooks 31). Thelwall's school, the Institution for the Cure of Impediments, served both sexes, and Thelwall educated his students to be "knowledgeable and enlightened individuals," with lessons in "the classical and scientific departments ... [t]o promote still further the studies and improvement of those pupils who may have advanced beyond the proper age for female instruction" (Diachyshyn 9).

Parents in the late eighteenth century used literary instructional books for children such as those created by Anna Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovel Edgeworth to educate their children. Barbauld's 1778-9 book *Lessons for Children* is quoted by Lim as being a "watershed moment in British children's literary history" (101). Barbauld was involved in children's (primarily boys') education for most of her life, as her father ran the Dissenting Kibworth Academy⁸, and Barbauld herself and her husband would later run Palgrave Academy (Rodgers 30). Her book *Lessons for Children* was influenced by her experiences as an instructor, and was created for her adopted son, Charles, after whom the protagonist is named (Douglas par. 7). An important aspect of Barbauld's book was that it "redefine[d] the role of emotion as a mode of perception by placing familial affection at the centre of human experience" (Lim 104), a theme Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall would incorporate into their novels. *Lessons* begins

⁸ Dissenting Academies were prestigious private schools "where nonconformists could receive scientific and technical training more advanced than that available at Oxford or Cambridge" (Richardson 78-9). Barbauld's early involvement with such an education may account for her future educational endeavors both literary and institutional.

by having the mother call Charles to her and has him sit upon her knee as she instructs him -- an intimacy which Lim suggests was imitated by parents in the eighteenth century (105). Thelwall would imitate Barbauld in his novel *The Daughter of Adoption* when, in the opening scene, he has Amelia (a mother figure also crafted in Wollstonecraft's image) take her son Henry upon her knee before speaking to him of his father (49). Barbauld's *Lessons* is also cited as one of the books Amelia reads to her son, demonstrating Thelwall's approval and value of the educational books (67). In his own teachings, Thelwall recalls a similar instance where he seats a young girl on his knee to instruct her on sentimental feeling (*The Peripatetic* 500).

Maria Edgeworth and her father, Richard Lovel Edgeworth, also wrote of the value of Barbauld's *Lessons* (Douglas par. 6). Their book *Practical Education* (1798) was, like those of Barbauld and the authors considered for this project, influenced by their own experiences raising and educating children (Douglas par. 6). Maria Edgeworth created educational books for children where Barbauld's *Lessons* ended, following Barbauld's successful formatting in *Lessons* of large print, named protagonists, and domestic scenes of instruction (Douglas par. 8). In *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths' write of children's emotional development and sensibility that "[o]ppression and terror necessarily produce meanness and deceit in all climates, and in all ages; and wherever fear is the governing motive in education" (Edgeworth 503). They argue for children to be taught not with violence and fear, but with love and acceptance, similar to the model presented by Barbauld, utilized by Thelwall, and argued by both Locke and Rousseau. After Thelwall instructs the young girl on the importance of sentiment and the child expresses a desire to right her previous actions, Thelwall exclaims: "[w]hat pity would it not have been that the embers of sensibility so kindly provided by Nature to warm this infant bosom, should have been smothered and neglected till the spark had at last expired!" (*The Peripatetic* 501). By

contrast, Wollstonecraft's heroine, Maria, is taught obedience by her authoritarian father through his orders, which "'were not to be disputed; and the whole house was expected to fly, at the word of command ... He was to be instantaneously obeyed, especially by my mother'" (*Maria* 211). Here, Wollstonecraft draws on her argument developed in *A Vindication* on the importance of women being educated so as not to be the servants and dependents of their husbands, but their equals: "[f]ragile in every sense of the word, [women] are obliged to look up to men for every comfort" (84). Maria's mother's lack of education is also shown through her weak physical health, and lack of interest in educating her children (*Maria* 212). Like Wollstonecraft's Maria, the aunt of Hays' Emma Courtney is also not educated in the Wollstonecraftian sense, as she is also described as being "delicate and fragile" (45) and she, like Maria's mother, dies shortly after the reader is introduced to her. It is only Henry's mother, Amelia, who is able to properly educate her child, having received, like Seraphina, an androgynous education: "'[my father] gave me, accordingly, something more than an ordinary female education; to the accomplishments of fashion adding several of the most interesting branches of useful knowledge'" (*Thelwall, Daughter* 54).

Middle-class girls and women were educated at home, when possible, by either a visiting master or a governess, in addition to the instruction provided by their mothers and occasionally fathers (Halsey par. 5; Simonton 41). A girl's typical formal education included: "various needlecraft skills, the art of polite conversation, dancing, music, drawing, painting, French, perhaps Italian, and subjects such as history, geography, and astronomy, with which to make polite conversation" (Simonton 44-5) and would take the form of conversations and lectures (Halsey par. 5). Girls and women's formal education "served little practical purpose" (Simonton 45) other than preparing women for their social debut and marriage prospects, as eighteenth-

century contemporary John Bennett remarked: “[the] education of women is unfortunately directed rather to such accomplishments, as will enable them to make a noise and sparkle in the world, than to those qualities, which might insure their comfort here, and happiness hereafter” (qtd. in Halsey par. 6). However, an androgynous education which included subjects typically reserved for a masculine education was believed to have “ma[de] girls idle and fit for nothing” (Simonton 36), an idea Wollstonecraft engages in *The Wrongs of Woman*, as Maria has her books taken from her by her father on the pretense that they made her idle (222).

Girls were also educated through boarding schools, which taught subjects similar to those taught at home. However, boarding schools were considered as detrimental to women’s learning, as “the ranges and quality were staggeringly broad” (Simonton 43).⁹ Instructors were often not well educated, a circumstance which Thelwall laments in *The Peripatetic*:

That in an enlightened age and country the education of youth should be so shamefully and so notoriously neglected! ... but that beings, disqualified even for the most ordinary situations of society, should be permitted to riot at large upon the indolent credulity of parents, and camp and fetter the infant minds it is their profession to cultivate and enlarge. (501)

Hays has Emma briefly attend a boarding school, at which Emma describes the teachers as “ignorant, [and] splenetic ... who encouraged not my emulation, and who sported with the acuteness of my sensations” (*Memoirs* 51). For Emma, boarding schools did not foster a virtuous, sentimental education so important to Locke and Rousseau, as Emma exclaims: “Ah! Never shall I forget the contrast I experienced ... no one loved, caressed, nor cared for me; -- my

⁹ See also Halsey’s “The Home Education of Girls in the Eighteenth-Century Novel: ‘The Pernicious Effects of an Improper Education’” and Richardson’s *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* for more on women’s education prior to standardization in 1870.

actions were all constrained ... my griefs were unheeded, and my sensibility ridiculed -- I neither gave nor received pleasure” (Hays, *Memoirs* 50). Although Thelwall’s heroine Seraphina does not attend boarding school, he has his hero Henry attend Eton, an experience which degrades the education his mother Amelia had provided for him:

[a]mong the unruly lads, destitute alike of reflection or principle, who are always to be found in such seminaries, he was, of course, but too much exposed to the danger of meeting with associates who would countenance and enflame every mischievous and extravagant propensity. (*Daughter* 81)

Like the heroines this project focuses on, Henry’s inconsistent formal education at boarding school, coupled with “silly” and “mysterious” books of romantic, imaginative reading under his father’s guidance, form his inconsistent adult behaviour (Thelwall, *Daughter* 67).

Hays provides the most in-depth exploration of her heroine’s formal education. It begins at a young age as Emma’s aunt reads “[s]tories from Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of like marvellous import” (*Memoirs* 48). These stories “excit[e] vivid emotions” in Emma and encourage her to read more exciting literature “which contained such enchanting stores of entertainment” (Hays, *Memoirs* 48). While Hays endorses and argues the importance of a sentimental education, Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication* writes of sentimental literature that it “tend[s] to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire” (83). Her negative perception of sensibility influences the effect sentimental literature has on her heroine in *The Wrongs of Woman*, as the narrator comments on Maria’s formal education that “she was too much under the influence of an ardent imagination to adhere to common rules” (186). Maria's predisposition to sensibility

leads her to form romantic ideals, as she quickly falls in love with Henry Darnford, a fellow prisoner. Emma similarly falls for Augustus Harley, although Emma's love is not required as Maria's is, and Hays is more ambiguous in her position towards sensibility, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

By the age of six Emma could read and recite from "Pope's Homer and Thomson's Seasons, little comprehending either" (Hays, *Memoirs* 48). It is also at this age that Emma develops a love for romance and literature which does not produce philosophical and educational thought. Maria similarly, as a result of her formal education, is swayed by romantic novels, as it is after reading Rousseau's *Julie; or The New Heloise* (1761) that she further falls in love with Darnford, based on the sensational romance described in the text: "she flew to Rousseau, as her only refuge from the idea of him, who might prove a friend, could she but find a way to interest him in her fate" (177). Wollstonecraft writes of this sort of reading without contemplation: "[m]iserable indeed, must be that being whose cultivation of the mind has only tended to inflame its passions!" (*A Vindication* 83). While Wollstonecraft writes in contempt of sensibility, Hays demonstrates the dangers of excessive sensibility through Emma's love of romantic literature without contemplation.

As Emma matures, her love for reading increases: "I subscribed to a circulating library, and frequently read, or rather devoured -- little careful in the reflection -- from ten to fourteen novels in a week" (Hays, *Memoirs* 53). Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall, through drawing on the model of sentimental education present in Rousseau and Locke, criticize the effects of such an education, as all three heroines engage in varying degrees of sensibility and form romantic relationships based on their sentimental education. Maria, after suffering imprisonment following the dissolution of her first marriage, quickly begins a new romantic relationship which also

(according to Wollstonecraft's notes for the intended completion of the novel) ends with Darnford being unfaithful (*Maria* 285-6). Emma and Augustus are never able to be together, despite Emma's epistolary insistence which forms the majority of the narrative. Seraphina also spends much of *The Daughter of Adoption* actively attempting to reform Henry's character, though her own excessive sensibility can be inferred from her behaviour and writings on the Isle of Margot (Thelwall 185-96). The misplacement of romantic sentiment is attached to the formal education of all three women, as, if they are not able to secure the affections of their beloved, they are destitute and left without the ability to provide for themselves: "Girls who have been thus weakly educated, are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision" (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 87). For women at the end of the eighteenth century, marriage was perceived as the paramount and ideal aspiration of both their formal education and purpose (Protor qtd. in Emsley 478).

Thelwall does not provide much information regarding Seraphina's formal education as to the books she reads, or the subjects studied, though it can be inferred, as she is referred to "as a female historian, a philosopher, and a poet," that she receives lessons in history, philosophy, rhetoric and composition, as well as elocution (*Daughter* 139). Seraphina receives the same "little lessons" intended for Parkinson's deceased daughter of the same name (Thelwall, *Daughter* 156). Before Parkinson adopts Seraphina, she is raised and educated by his friend, Robertson, and the two men instruct Seraphina together (Thelwall, *Daughter* 156). This joint model of education, although not explicit in content, is hindered by Robertson's wife, who sees Seraphina as not deserving of the education intended for their own daughter, Mira. Robertson's wife follows the debate in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*, in which women who only receive the traditional formal education "are very unfit to manage a family; for, by an undue stretch of

power, they are always tyrannizing to support a superiority that only rests on the arbitrary distinction of fortune” (89). Seraphina also receives a “fashionable” female formal education as Parkinson notes that by the age of eleven, “[s]he had already borne away the prize in every fashionable accomplishment, and every intellectual attainment” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 156). In this way, Seraphina is educated in both the typical, female formal education and the atypical, masculine education of history, philosophy, rhetoric, and composition. However, despite Seraphina’s androgynous formal education, she is unable to separate herself from her attachment to Henry, an event which positions her as a social outcast once she leaves St. Domingo.

Through comparing Rousseau’s and Locke’s philosophical texts and Rousseau’s novel *Emile* in relation to the conduct books and children’s literature produced in the later eighteenth century, a clear relation between these texts and the novels produced by Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Thelwall can be discerned. Each of the texts under consideration engages in the traditional, formal education young women would have received and provides the framework for some of the issues the heroines will face as the novels progress, such as a heightened sensibility and combating the socially sanctioned place women were expected to occupy in relation to education and independence. In the next chapter I assess the heroines’ self-education through libraries, where they read materials reserved for a masculine education, and the debates they engaged in as a result of their self-education.

Chapter 3 Self-Education

While women's traditional formal education in the Romantic period was largely based on eighteenth-century social norms, conduct book literature, and women's domestic place in patriarchal society, women's self-education represented a shift in the way they were traditionally viewed and believed to behave intellectually. Women desired not to completely dismantle the patriarchy and the oppressive beliefs that regulated their formal education, but to be accepted as contributing members of society, equal to men. Their self-education in the radical novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and John Thelwall is composed of two major parts: access to libraries, where the heroines are able to read; and access to debate, where they are able to discuss their own ideas and beliefs with members of both sexes. Through their self-education in libraries, often under the tutelage of male family members, the heroines are able to read subject matter normally reserved for a masculine education, which they are then able to use to argue and defend their own position in patriarchal society through debate.

Emma, Maria, and Seraphina are each educated through libraries. I will focus first on Emma and Maria as their narratives follow similar themes: their experiences are guided by male mentors, and there are limitations on what they are allowed to read. Heroines were often educated "by a man who functions as a father figure" as a result of poor "mother-daughter" relationships often caused by the mother's traditional, formal education (Golightly 39). Mothers, in the radical novels of the 1790s, are unable to educate their daughters beyond their own traditional conceptions of women's responsibilities and accomplishments discussed in Chapter Two, making it impossible for them to enact change through the education of their children. Emma's self-education begins when her father notices her tendency towards sensibility (Hays,

Memoirs 53-4). Mr Courtney has Emma attend his residence in Berkley-square¹⁰, where he supplies her with “such books ... as he judged would be useful to me; and, in the intervals of his various occupations and amusements, assist me himself with occasional remarks and reflections” (Hays, *Memoirs* 54). Mr Courtney allows Emma access to his library; however, he at first controls the books she reads, instructing her “to read the histories and scientific works” (Golightly 40; Sharma 147). Emma’s father first has her read “the lives of Plutarch,” which she initially considers with “disgust” (Hays, *Memoirs* 56) as a result of her traditional, formal education and “imagination [that] had been left to wander unrestrained in the fairy fields of fiction” (55). However, under her father’s careful mentorship, Emma becomes interested in history and philosophy and experiences an intellectual awakening: “[b]ut my attention, as I proceeded, was soon forcibly arrested, my curiosity excited, and my enthusiasm awakened” (Hays, *Memoirs* 56). As Mr Courtney recognizes Emma’s intellectual capacities, he eventually provides her with the key to his library, where she reads:

[a]ccounts of the early periods of states and empires, of the Grecian and Roman republics, I pursued with pleasure and enthusiasm: but when they became more complicated, grew corrupt, luxurious, licentious, perfidious, mercenary, I turned from them fatigued, and disgusted, and sought to recreate my spirits in the fairer regions of poetry and fiction. (Hays, *Memoirs* 59)

While it should be noted that Emma’s sensibility still informs her reading selection -- a consequence of her early, unregulated, formal education -- she is still able to make philosophical

¹⁰ As noted by Marilyn L. Brooks, the editor of the Broadview Edition of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Mr Courtney’s residence at Berkley-square was a “smart residential area popular with literary persons including Hays’s friend, Mary ‘Perdita’ Robinson” (Brooks 54). That Hays chose to have Emma’s father and tutor reside in the popular, intellectual literary area would have signaled to readers his ability to properly tutor Emma, along with his recognition and familiarity with noteworthy literary figures of the time period.

enquiries and “reason freely”: “I ... endeavored to arrange and methodize my opinions, and to trace them fearlessly through all their consequences: while from exercising my thoughts with freedom, I seemed to acquire new strength and dignity of character” (Hays, *Memoirs* 59-60). Emma’s ability to “reason freely” not only allows her access to masculine intellectual pursuits, but also supplies her with the ability to critically consider the literature she reads and come to her own conclusions, which in turn strengthens her character and ability to argue her new-found beliefs and morals.

Maria’s self-education under the direction of her uncle follows a similar narrative in Wollstonecraft’s work. While Maria’s uncle, like Emma’s father, supplies her with literature, he selects books ““for which I had a passion, and they conspired with his conversation, to make me form an ideal picture of life”” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 214). Her self-education under the tutelage of her uncle is influenced by his sentimental temperament, an aspect that Maria, upon reflection, argues affected her emotional development:

‘[h]e drew such animated pictures of his own feelings, rendered permanent by disappointment, as imprinted the sentiments strongly on my heart, and animated my imagination. These remarks are necessary to elucidate some peculiarities in my character, which by the world are indefinitely termed romantic.’ (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 214)

Perhaps more concerning, in comparing Maria’s self-education to Emma’s, is that Maria does not learn to “reason freely” (Hays, *Memoirs* 59), and instead mimics and adopts her uncle’s beliefs and perspectives:

‘[i]t is not then surprising that I quickly adopted his opinions in preference, and revered him as one of a superior order of beings. He inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure or

applause of the world; nay, he *almost taught me to brave*, and even despise its censure, when convinced of the rectitude of my own intentions.’ (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 214, my emphasis)

The only redeeming feature of Maria’s self-education under her uncle’s tutelage is that he teaches her of the injustices of patriarchal society. Her uncle’s instruction no doubt prepares Maria’s radical thinking towards women’s rights, while at the same time harming her sensibility through books and speech.

Maria’s first exposure to libraries under the instruction of her uncle prepares her intellectually for her experience in the prison, where she reads avidly to pass the time. In the opening pages of the novel, the narrator observes: “[t]he books she had obtained, were soon devoured, by one who had no other resource to escape from sorrow, and the feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity, which equally weaken the intoxicated sensibility” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 169). Maria’s inclination towards romantic literature and sensibility offers a form of escapism for her; however, her inclination towards these subjects is further inflamed when she encounters the books and marginalia of fellow inmate and future lover, Henry Darnford: “[s]he read them over and over again; and fancy, treacherous fancy, began to sketch a character, congenial with her own, from these shadowy outlines” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 173). Both Darnford and Augustus are: “heros largely created by the heroine’s imagination” (Ty 54). Maria and Emma craft and model their love interests based on the sensational romantic fiction they encounter during their formal and self-education. As a result of both heroines’ fragmented androgynous education, they are unable to see their romantic partners as they truly are, a theme which will be further developed in the fourth chapter.

However, Emma and Maria's overactive sensibility is not a fault inherent in their gender, an argument which Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Mary Robinson¹¹ make in their philosophical and fictional works, but the result of the heroines' traditional, formal education and their male tutors' inability to properly mentor them. Sharma argues: "Emma's father, though admittedly a product of gentlemanly education, lacks the necessary moral worthiness to be the sure guide of his daughter's unconventional education" (Sharma 147). Sharma's acute observation is based on Mr Courtney's "enjoy[ing] life too freely" (Hays, *Memoirs* 53), as his lavish lifestyle also creates the financial disparity which condemns his daughter to a life of "dependence" (Hays, *Memoirs* 65). Maria's uncle is likewise a poor moral instructor for his niece, as his past experience of "becoming attached to a young lady of great beauty and large fortune" influences his ability to educate Maria properly without imbuing his reasoning with unnecessary sentiment (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 212). Both men's "moral [un]worthiness" (Sharma 147), a result of their "gentlemanly education" (147), can account for the flaws in Emma and Maria's self-education: Mr Courtney's later unguarded tutelage inspires Emma to continue to indulge in romantic reverie, while Maria's uncle's inability to move past his own sensibility inhibits his ability to transfer a rational learning model on to Maria, which influences her attachment to romantic literature when imprisoned, and her idealised romantic relationship with Darnford.

While Seraphina does not have a male instructor for her library experience (though it can be assumed that Parkinson had books which she read, and the two would have engaged in discussion), she does have a female instructor, Amelia, though she dies before Seraphina can meet her in person. As Diachyshyn and the editors of the Broadview Press edition of *The Daughter of Adoption* assert,

¹¹ See Robinson's fictional novel *The Natural Daughter* (1799).

Seraphina is evidently smitten by what she hears of Amelia's 'philosophical and benevolent character' yet the fact that the two characters are kept apart is significant, especially since Amelia, in personality and ethos, is a more obvious role model for Seraphina than her birth mother, the meddling and machinating Morton. (Diachyshyn 83)

Although Seraphina and Amelia never meet in person, Thelwall has the two communicate through Amelia's library, which "seemed as though her spirit still hovered and presided there: and her form (such as imagination fashioned it) rose before the intellectual eye of Seraphina" (*Daughter* 284). Seraphina's experience in Amelia's library is largely influenced by Emma's experience in her father's library (Diachyshyn 84); however, Seraphina is able to communicate with Amelia posthumously through her favourite books and marginalia: "while she turned over the pages of Amelia's favourite authors ... and noted the leaves she had doubled, and the passages she had scored, she seemed to enter more intimately into her tastes and feelings" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 286). In addition to the parallel between Emma's and Seraphina's library experiences, Diachyshyn and the editors of the Broadview Press edition of the novel also note the "obvious parallel between Amelia's posthumous transference of wisdom and the passing of books between Darnford and Maria" (Diachyshyn 84) in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*; but, "Seraphina's act of reading Amelia's marginalia is sustaining and regenerative" (Diachyshyn 84), while Maria's reading of Darnford's marginalia is sentimental and destructive.

The ability of women to debate their own opinions and beliefs, a central component of women's self-education, often includes their conversing with both sexes. Women's participation and attendance at debating societies "eventually encouraged women, directly and indirectly, to express their own perspectives and positions within a particular forum" (Diachyshyn 37) addressing issues both pertaining to women and to society in general (32): women were even

able to “influenc[e] [the] topics of discussion” (30). By 1780, there were four debating societies in London that catered specifically to women: “La Belle Assemblee, the Female Parliament, the Charlise House Debates for Ladies Only, and the Female Congress” (Andrew 410). Thelwall argues in his writing and theory the need for a “universal nature of communication whereby, regardless of gender, physicality and utterance successfully combine to foster capable citizens able to exercise their abilities freely and unimpeded” (Diachyshyn 89). Debating societies acted as a leveling force, (Andrew 407) where regardless of class and gender, individuals could gather “to discuss and argue not only the issues of the day, but topics of long-range interest” (405). Women’s participation in gender-inclusive debates also occurred at Bluestocking parties, where “a mixed company spent their time on serious conversation rather than cards” (Brown 118), further proving women’s ability to engage in meaningful discussion.

While debating societies are not represented in the novels, the education they offered is engaged through the representation of debate. Emma, Maria, and Seraphina each engage in debate with members of both sexes in political, philosophical, and gender arguments where they are able to exercise their knowledge of these subjects as a result of their androgynous education. The heroines are, through these debates, able to advocate for their place in patriarchal society through intellectual discourse in order to influence social change, “to claim freedom of speech from below, and to resist the very intellectual hierarchies and institutions by which [they are] still marginalized” (Thompson, “Elocutionary Rhetoric” 2).

Emma engages in various debates with both sexes, beginning during her visits to Berkley-square. During these discussions, Emma remains silent and listens to the men debate philosophical subjects: “I collected materials for reflection ... I never ventured to mingle in the conversations, but I overcame my timidity sufficiently to behave with propriety and composure; I

listened attentively to all that was said, and my curiosity was awakened to philosophical enquiries” (Hays, *Memoirs* 59). Following her father’s death, Emma’s ability to listen to intellectually stimulating debate ends, as “she is confined to the company of her aunt, Mrs. Morton, and her two women cousins and chafes under the complete denial of any intellectual stimulation whatsoever” (Sharma 144). It is through discussing and writing to Mr Francis, a friend of her late father, that Emma’s intellectual abilities and interests are exercised (Norton 299; Sharma 157-8). Upon reflecting on their intellectual relationship, Emma writes: “[m]y understanding was exercised by attending to the observations of Mr Francis, and by discussing the questions to which they led; yet it was exercised without being gratified: he opposed and bewildered me, convicted me of error, and harassed me with doubt” (Hays, *Memoirs* 72). While it can be argued that Mr Francis is not a compatible conversationalist for Emma, it is important that she is able to apply what she has learned in her father’s library and exercise her reasoning. For instance, early in their relationship, Emma and Mr Francis enter into a debate regarding women’s rights:

[MF]: ‘Tell me what it is you fear: -- are your apprehensions founded in reason?’

[E]: ‘Recollect my youth, my sex, and my precarious situation.’

[MF]: ‘I thought you contemned the plea of *sex*, as a sanction for weakness!’

[E]: ‘Though I disallow it as natural, I admit it as an artificial, plea.’

[MF]: ‘Explain yourself.’

[E]: ‘The character, you tell me, is modified by circumstance: the customs of society, then, have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman.’ (Hays, *Memoirs* 72-3)

Mr Francis allows Emma to exercise her reason, developed through her androgynous education, and to argue based on her own beliefs. Throughout the narrative, Emma writes to Mr Francis for

advice on her feelings for Augustus and her place in society as an educated, but poor, woman. To each query, “the Godwinian Mr Francis urges Emma to ‘independence’” (Norton 299) without realizing that his “principles -- which ostensibly describe universal facts of life -- might apply to humans who are not male” (306). Hays has Emma respond to Mr Francis, or rather, Godwin’s advice, in an “audacious act of philosophical rhetoric” to prove that Godwin’s theories regarding gender and social justice are “wrong even according to his own principles” (Norton 306). Through Emma’s discussions with Mr Francis, Hays represents women’s ability to engage in philosophical and meaningful debate.

Emma’s relationship with Augustus, while intellectually stimulating, is emotionally damaging for Emma’s heightened sensibility.¹² Her feelings for Augustus are motivated by the stories her friend, and Augustus’ mother, Mrs Harley tells of her son, but also by Augustus’ ability and “willingness to assist Emma ‘in the pursuit of learning’ ... he widens Emma’s mental horizons and encourages her development in the way that no one else had before” (Ty 54). Her frequent letters to Augustus show that: “[i]ntermingled with her attempts to reason Augustus into reciprocating her love for him are statements by Emma about her firm belief in women’s ability to reason and their need for independence” (Golightly 77). Hays likely drew from her own personal experiences in crafting Emma’s desire to be partnered with Augustus:

Hays sought relationships with men ... because they were her means of access to knowledge, and because the discourse of emotional relationships gave her a way of locating for herself an admittedly ambiguous enunciative position within the social text.

¹² Gates, Golightly, Joy, Ty, and Rajan all engage in the discussion surrounding Emma’s relationship with Augustus. To analyse their arguments in full, see Gates’ “Reworking Work from Wollstonecraft to Hays,” Golightly’s *The Family, Marriage, and Radicalism in British Women's Novels of the 1790*, Joy’s “Novel Feelings: Emma Courtney's Point of View,” Ty’s *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, and Rajan’s “Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays' ‘Memoirs of Emma Courtney.’”

Where her relationships with male mentors preserved the gender hierarchy that Emma struggles against in her correspondence with Francis, her more passionate relationships promised (at least ideally) a union with the male that would lead to a transcendence of hierarchy and difference. (Rajan 162)

Hays, like Wollstonecraft, knew that in order to be granted access to the male “worlds of intellectual delights” (Sharma 145), they would need to be associated through marriage to men who could grant them access “that [their] gender and thus [their] education have denied [them]” (145). While most of Emma’s later discussions with Augustus, both in person and epistolary, argue the need for them to be romantically united, her early associations with him “[are] spent in intellectually improving conversation, reading, and debate” (Golightly 49). For example, in one of Emma’s final letters to Augustus, arguing the need for them to be together, she demonstrates her ability to reason and constructs a detailed argument for their relationship: “I will arrange, under five heads, (on all occasions, I love to class and methodize) every other possible species of objection, and subjoin all the reasonings which have occurred to me on the subjects” (Hays, *Memoirs* 152). While unable (or unwilling) to comprehend Augustus’ refusal to accept her as his partner, Emma’s note that “on all occasions, I do love to class and methodize” emphasizes her ability to reason and debate various issues rationally and methodically.

While Emma does engage in in-person debates, much of her radical, philosophical reasoning occurs in her letters. Ty argues that “Emma’s relationship to the two most important male figures in her life -- to her father and to her beloved Augustus -- [are] similarly signaled by the absence and thereafter effusion of speech” (49). While I agree that Emma does have difficulty communicating with her father and her father’s friends, these discussions occur early in Emma’s self-education, as she is still learning and utilizing her father’s library. Following her

discussions with Mr Francis, and as she builds a somewhat complicated relationship with Augustus, her ability to reason and debate is greatly expanded through in-person debate and in her letters, where she is able to communicate her feelings in greater depth. During a mixed gathering where Augustus is present, Emma discloses her opinions on war, although unpopular with the company present (Mr Pemberton having “held commission in the militia”) (Hays, *Memoirs* 142). As the conversation turns to women and education, both Mr Melmoth and Mr Pemberton argue against women’s intellectual reasoning: “[l]et them think only about their dress, and I have no objection, but don’t let them plague us with *sermonizing*” (Hays, *Memoirs* 144). Emma, as a result of her self-education, is able to retort smartly: “[t]hat some of the gentlemen, present, should object to a woman’s exercising her discriminating powers, is not wonderful, since it might operate greatly to their disadvantage” (Hays, *Memoirs* 144). Employing Wollstonecraft’s argument in favour of androgynous education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* discussed in previous chapters, Emma is able to argue for women’s education, and attempts to convince Mrs Melmoth “that to be treated like *ideots* [sic] was no real compliment; and that the men who condescend to flatter our foibles, despised the weak beings they helped to form” (Hays, *Memoirs* 145).

Maria, in *The Wrongs of Woman*, like Emma, engages in multiple debates and discussions with members of both sexes. Following Jemima’s retelling of her life history, Maria and Darnford enter into a discussion concerning independence and class conflict, as Darnford states:

‘[i]f the poor are happy, or can be happy, *things are very well as they are* ... insisting that it is the lot of the majority to be oppressed in this life, ... though riches may fail to

produce proportionate happiness, poverty most commonly excludes it, by shutting up all the avenues of improvement.’ (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 201)

Maria responds, somewhat ironically, given her own overactive sensibility, “[a]nd as for the affections ... how gross, and even tormenting do they become, unless regulated by an improved mind!” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 201). Sensibility is a theme which Wollstonecraft discusses in both of her *Vindications*, with “excessive sensibility” representing “a social evil that Wollstonecraft clearly associates with madness” (Cove 675). Wollstonecraft has Maria argue her own ideas regarding women and reason, as Cove attests that

[a]s a feminist rationalist, Wollstonecraft objects to medical discourse’s characterization of women as entirely physical and emotional, but her political writing nonetheless replicates the relationship between excessive sensibility and psychological disorder that the medical writers ... promote, in a manner consistent with her definition of madness as ‘the absence of reason.’ (674)

Through her ability to rationalize and discuss philosophical and political subjects with others, Maria is able to demonstrate the importance of female education and reason.

Maria’s most impressive, though unsuccessful, debate occurs after she, Jemima, and Darnford escape from prison and Maria’s husband, George Venables, accuses Darnford of adultery and seduction.¹³ Following these charges, Maria writes a letter arguing both her and Darnford’s innocence, a letter which “might have remained unopened to this day, or been passed to the prosecution to make what they would of it. Maria’s defense, in relation to how the law and legal practice of England in her day, is a silent and fantastic (im)possibility” (Jordan 224). While highly unlikely, the fact that Wollstonecraft has her heroine defend women’s rights and is “able

¹³ See Elaine Jordan’s detailed analysis of both charges in her article: “Criminal Conversation: Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘The Wrongs of Woman.’”

to speak judiciously and in public” (Jordan 224) is of greater importance. Maria begins by detailing her past relationship with her husband, before expressing: ““I wish my country to approve of my conduct; but, if laws exist, made by the strong to oppress the weak, *I appeal to my own sense of justice*, and declare that I will not live with the individual, who has violated every moral obligation which binds man to man”” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 283, my emphasis). What is extraordinary about this passage, is that Maria follows the self-education her uncle provided her by disregarding public opinions and deciding to be her own judge, jury, and justice: in essence, to live by her own morals and philosophy, regardless of what society might think. She goes on to ““claim then a divorce”” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 283) on the same grounds as stated above, employing the law in what Jordan terms a “fantastic use of legal discourse” (229).

Maria also enjoys debates with her husband’s friend, in which she participates shortly after her marriage. Although he remains unnamed, Maria reflects that, as a man of learning, he could discuss with her ““subjects of taste”” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 248). Despite later learning that he intends to have sex with Maria in order to procure a debt from her husband, Maria is fortunately able to deflect the situation and leave her marriage. While the attempted assault on Maria is successfully avoided, Wollstonecraft does detail instances where women are not as fortunate in Jemima’s retelling of her past. Brown describes in her analysis of women in the eighteenth century, that women’s traditional education and conduct books advocate: “proper behaviour in young women will prevent men from making sexual advances, and so do not give advice on how to deal with them; advice concentrates on how to spot dangerous men at an earlier stage” (39). As is detailed in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and Mary Robinson’s *A Letter to the Women of England*, women’s need to defend themselves from men is

a lack found in both their formal and self-education. As mentioned in the first chapter, Robinson advocates women's right to defend themselves:

[i]f a man receive an insult, he is justified in seeking retribution. He may chastise, challenge, and even destroy his adversary. Such a proceeding in MAN is termed honourable; his character is exonerated from the stigma which calumny attached to it; his courage rises in estimation, in proportion as it exemplifies his revenge. But were a WOMAN to attempt such an expedient, however strong her sense of injury, however invincible her fortitude, or important the preservation of character, she would be deemed a murderess. (42)

Robinson's argument is based on "the first of Nature's rights, self-preservation" (44). Robinson's claim "had considerable cultural currency" as it is mentioned in the works of contemporaries such as Dryden, Samuel Butler, and even Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* (Setzer 23). That women struggle to defend themselves is apparent in all three texts under consideration: the most explicit example is Jemima's retelling of her past. At the age of sixteen, Jemima is sexually assaulted by her mistress' husband and forced to keep quiet about the abuse or risk being fired: "he contrived to be alone in the house with me, and by blows -- yes; blows and menaces, compelled me to submit to his ferocious desire; and, to avoid my mistress's fury, I was obliged in future to comply, and skulk to my loft at his command, in spite of increasing loathing" (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 193). After Jemima becomes pregnant a result of the assault, and her condition is revealed to the mistress of the house, she is fired and forced into prostitution, as an uneducated woman with no other options (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 194). Without an education, Jemima is unaware of how to defend herself, but once she acquires books and is able to read and discuss with one of her male employers, Jemima comes to learn of her situation and place in

society as a woman (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 197-8). Despite her fragmented self-education, Jemima is perhaps better educated, and able to live in patriarchal society, than Maria, as “Jemima’s ‘feminine emotions’ are more resilient than Maria’s nurtured, middle-class sensibility” (Poovey 118; Ty 39). Jemima is able to save Maria both during their escape from prison and later from suicide because of her resilience, despite her troubled past. It is Jemima’s self-education, uninhibited by sensibility, that allows her to survive in ways which Maria is not capable of doing.

Emma must also defend herself from societal expectations, and must maintain her innocence when accused of forming an intimate relationship with Mr Francis by her uncle, Mr Morton:

‘I am informed, that you breakfasted with Mr Francis this morning, and attended him through the Park: -- this, with your late walk yesterday evening, and evident emotion on your return, let me tell you, child, wears an indecorous appearance: -- the world is justly attentive to the conduct of young women, and too apt to be censorious.’ (Hays, *Memoirs* 76)

In order to defend herself rationally and methodically, Emma asks for her uncle to clarify his accusation (Hays, *Memoirs* 77). After hearing her uncle’s reasoning, in which he repeats traditional social beliefs surrounding women’s chastity and modesty, Emma explains that she “considered Mr Francis as a *philosopher*, and not as a *lover*” (Hays, *Memoirs* 78). As the argument intensifies, Emma and her uncle remove to the library, where the two are able to have a rational discussion and Emma is cleared of her perceived disastrous behaviour. It is notable that Emma is not able to have a similar, rational discussion with either her aunt or cousins, as a result of their own traditional, formal female education.

In *The Daughter of Adoption*, Seraphina acts as an educated and vocal advocate for women's rights who is able to defend herself and engage in vigorous discourse with members of both sexes. She engages in frequent debates with Henry on the topic of their romantic attachment, a theme which will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, it is crucial to understand the argument that Seraphina repeatedly makes for Henry to relinquish his degenerate habits, a result of his unguided, "gentlemanly education" (Sharma 147) discussed in Chapter Two, and instead to embrace the intellectual world of reason and shared intellectual compatibility with herself: "try with me, the sweets of a more rational intercourse! ... Look more to intellect, my Henry, and less to sense -- walk with the philosophers and the muses, instead of revelling with bacchanalians" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 272). Like Emma's and Maria's, Seraphina's argument is based on her belief in intellectual reciprocity, as she argues to her nurse, who is later revealed to be her mother, that "[s]he must associate upon a footing of equality with the man she loved, or relinquish his society altogether" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 326).

When debating with Morton, Seraphina exercises her ability to reason, and assess the situation based on her androgynous education. Upon coming to England, Seraphina follows her untraditional values and pays little attention to the regulations and opinions of English society, a choice which she later comes to regret:

[s]he mourned therefore alike over her lost utilities and her hopes; and reproached herself, in the bitterness of heart, for having despised too much the prejudices and false opinions of the world, without considering how much opinions (while established), however false in themselves, must necessarily operate upon the moral and intellectual

capabilities of the individuals to whose conduct they may attach. (Thelwall, *Daughter* 301)

As Morton continues to push Seraphina to abandon Henry and his noncommittal habits, Seraphina argues that to abandon Henry and to pursue a new romantic partner would go against her reason: “[i]t destroys my utilities, and counteracts my reason. Part of those utilities are forever gone: for they depend on the estimation of the world. Something, however, as yet, remains; and of that I am determined to be more chary” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 337). As Thompson states, “she grudgingly acknowledges the obstacles that her loss of virginity places in the way of marriage” (*Transatlantic Thelwall* 9); however, Seraphina chooses to value her intellectual “utilities” and acts to preserve them, as she refuses to marry Henry until he becomes the partner she deserves: an intellectual and romantic companion. In continuing her discussion with Morton, she argues that she must “be mistress of [her] own conduct; as far as human reason can command” and not relinquish her beliefs and opinions in favour of social norms: “[a]s a moral agent, I have a right, I have a duty, in the free exercise of my understanding -- in the choice of my motives -- in my preference of moral action” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 337). It is through Seraphina’s debates with Morton that her “strongly Wollstonecraftian virtues” are developed and she is able to exercise her reason and argue her morals (Thompson, *Building* 7).

Another instance in which Seraphina is able to argue her rights as a rational, “free-reasoning” (Hays, *Memoirs* 59) individual is during a heated debate with Moroon, after he kidnaps her and Morton and attempts to force her to become his mistress and heiress of his property (Thelwall, *Daughter* 374). Seraphina, in a style reminiscent of Robinson’s *A Letter*, viciously attacks Moroon’s proposal, and defends both her honour and intellectual integrity:

‘[n]ot mine shall be the terror, guilty wretch! But thine! -- the sufferance not mine but thy own! I will haunt thee with apprehensions: I will rack thee with alarms: ... These beauties thou tellest of revelling in shall be basilisks to strike thee dead: and while thou holdest in thy hand the power of life and death, thou shalt tremble to meet my eyes’ ...

‘Thy days shall be worn with useless plottings, and thy nights with fear: and when harassed and disappointed, thou wouldst wish to shake me off, my insulted honour shall still fasten upon thee for vengeance. Seas shall not protect thee, nor thy boasted property preserve. *I will drag thee to the public eye of scorn. I will trample thee by the confiscations of vindictive justice.*’ (Thelwall, *Daughter* 375, my emphasis)

Like Maria’s letter addressed to the court, Seraphina verbally vindicates her right to act on “my own sense of justice” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 283), even if her actions are not accepted by society in general. By following her moral beliefs developed through her androgynous education, she will expose Moroon’s actions “to the public eye of scorn,” even if she is forced into a relationship with him, an event which is only avoided by her fantastic disappearance from her holding cell (Thelwall, *Daughter* 377). Seraphina’s explosive use of sensibility, a form of communication that “was censored in the late Enlightenment even by the most powerful radical female prose polemicists” (Armstrong 15) as it was considered “special feminine discourse” (15), is weaponized as Seraphina is able to defend herself, vindicate her innocence, and debate her own rights and moral beliefs. While Hays and especially Wollstonecraft position their heroines’ excessive sensibility as a fault which hinders their romantic relationships and ability to reason, Seraphina’s use of sensibility, in what Armstrong terms “the customary ‘feminine’ forms of language” (16), allows her to defend and preserve her place in patriarchal society while attempting to reform it from within.

The heroines' self-education provides them with the ability to vocalize and defend their beliefs and morals which were developed in both their formal and self-educations. Through studying literature and materials reserved for a masculine education, the heroines are able to rationalize and expand on what they learned during their formal education. By defending their beliefs and morals developed through their androgynous educations by debate, the heroines attempt to influence societal change and claim a position in society equal to men. In the following chapter I will analyse each heroine's attempt to reform society through exploring the endings of the novels and to what extent each heroine is successful in reforming patriarchal society through the reformation of the family.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Despite the formal and self-education of heroines in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and John Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption*, the problem of their acceptance in patriarchal society remains. Their advanced learning through self-education by access to libraries and debate -- though beneficial to the heroines' ability to defend themselves and advocate their rights -- isolates them through the radical morals and beliefs they develop. Additionally, their perseverance in maintaining relationships with partners who are not intellectually and emotionally compatible with them, nor willing to marry them, hinders their ability to influence social change -- as without the socially sanctioned bond of marriage the heroines are isolated as radical outcasts from society. It is only through marriage, and the establishment of the family, that the heroines are able to realize their place in patriarchal society. They are then able to influence change through educating their children, and by extension, society. This chapter will analyse the endings of each text to determine to what extent the heroines are able to utilize the skills developed through their formal and self-educations to make satisfactory relationships with their romantic partners, and to establish a reformed family where their beliefs and morals can influence society.

Emma, Maria, and Seraphina each attempt through their premarital relationships to gain access to patriarchal society as the equals of men, a realm which remains off-limits to them as "the society in which these heroines live cannot tolerate such relationships, regardless of how justified or virtuous the heroines believe them to be" (Golightly 80). Social inclusion is denied the heroines as a result of the traditional perceptions surrounding women and chastity, furthered through women's formal education and conduct book literature, and despite the heroines' best efforts (Golightly 80). Female chastity for eighteenth-century contemporaries represented "the

integrity of the family” (Poovey 115) and was the defining feature of women’s existence (Emsley 478). Through marriage, women would be stripped of their sexuality as desiring beings, but also “of their status as autonomous subjects” (Poovey 116). As the heroines attempt to maintain their autonomy through their premarital relationships, they come to realize that these relationships are impossible given the social and personal preferences of their partners and of contemporary society.

Emma’s relationship with Augustus has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Golightly, Joy, Sharma, and Ty all agree that their relationship is tumultuous, while Golightly argues that even Emma’s relationship with Augustus’ mother, Mrs Harley, is included in the text “to ignite Emma’s ill-fortuned passion for Augustus. It is Mrs. Harley’s praise of her son, the basis of much of their conversation, that works on Emma’s imagination to the extent that she is half in love with Augustus before she has met him” (41). After meeting him, Emma “spends pages somewhat laboriously rationalizing her love and physical desire for Augustus” (Golightly 66) in what both Golightly and Ty contend is an argument in favour of “the existence of female desire” which “challeng[es] the objectification and silencing of women” (Ty 50). However, Emma’s sensibility interferes with Hays’ feminist “lesson” on women’s sexual desire and freedom of speech: “the lesson is often lost or sublimated as the reader gets enticed into the novel. The moral, which has to do with the consequences of indulged passion, becomes increasingly contradictory and ambiguous” (Ty 46). Emma’s sensibility complicates a clear reading of Hays’ stance on female sexual liberation and freedom of speech, as Emma is unable to free herself from the relationship she has imagined with Augustus. In this way, she remains trapped in an unrequited romantic relationship which “complicates matters by making it difficult to ascertain if Hays is endorsing or critiquing Emma’s sentimental excess” (Sharma 155).

However, not all critics view Emma's excessive sensibility as a negative trait of her character. Joy argues that through Emma's heightened sensibility, Hays is able to realize her "feminist lesson" of exposing the truth about sensibility and emotions: "that passions are ungendered; that experiencing extreme emotions is a condition not of being female, but of being human" (277).

While I agree with Golightly, Sharma, and Ty that Emma's heightened sensibility makes it difficult to decide if Hays is endorsing or opposing sensibility, the male characters in all three texts are also characterized by their sensibility. Augustus is influenced by his emotions, as in his farewell speech to Emma he says "I had not only to contend against my own sensibility, but against yours also" (Hays, *Memoirs* 206). Henry's sensibility propels his desire to marry Seraphina, though he is unwilling to reform his character so that the two can be united in marriage. Though not as overtly sentimental as Henry or even Augustus, Darnford uses sensibility to manipulate Maria into developing romantic feelings for him, a theme that will be explored further later in this chapter. Regardless of whether sensibility is represented as a positive or negative driving force in the novels, it remains that the characters, both male and female, are either influenced or driven by sensibility, reinforcing Joy's argument that emotions are human and genderless, and that it is the duty of all to master them through reason.

Emma begins her argument to Augustus by stating the importance of their relationship based on "the union between mind and mind" (Hays, *Memoirs* 133). It is on the basis of this union that Emma believes they "have the potential to make a tremendous difference in society" (Golightly 75). She wishes to use her platform as the wife of Augustus to advocate women's right to speech and debate, as she argues in a letter to Augustus:

'[h]ence the eccentricities of conduct, with which women of superior minds have been accused -- the struggles ... of an ardent spirit, denied a scope for its exertions! The

strong feelings, the strong energies, *which properly directed*, in a field sufficiently wide, might -- ah! What might they not have aided?' (Hays, *Memoirs* 116, my emphasis)

Through "the advantage of expressing [her] thoughts and feelings with freedom" (Hays, *Memoirs* 119), Emma intends to educate women, and society in general, on sensibility and the importance of feeling when "properly directed" (Golightly 58-9). By stressing the importance of guided sensibility, Hays argues against Wollstonecraft on the importance of sentiment in relation to an androgynous education, and for the co-existence of both.

As Emma's arguments in favour of her relationship with Augustus continues to be unsuccessful, she writes in a letter that she is willing to live with him outside the bond of marriage: "*My friend -- I would give myself to you -- the gift is not worthless*" (Hays, *Memoirs* 155), a decision that "is not only justified but virtuous" according to Emma's morals and beliefs surrounding intellectual and emotional compatibility (Golightly 75-6). Like Seraphina, Emma does not offer her companionship, both mental and physical, without "a reciprocal faith plighted and returned" (Hays, *Memoirs* 154), as she values their relationship above the standards of contemporary society. But she is not willing to sacrifice her public reputation for a nonreciprocal relationship. Emma values her and Augustus' bond above that of a socially sanctioned marriage, which expounds her radical "lack of faith in the sanctity of the marriage ceremony, coupled with a strong sense that only mental compatibility and shared commitment between a man and a woman was necessary to make a union moral and virtuous" (Golightly 59). As with Maria and Seraphina, Emma is willing to sacrifice her reputation in order to achieve a union of mutual intellectual and emotional compatibility. However, Augustus is unwilling to accept Emma's proposal and continues to evade her letters.

In *The Wrongs of Woman*, Maria, as a result of her romantic tendencies, “in effect bastilles herself by subscribing to a notion of female sensibility that limits her capacity for reason and places her in the power of manipulative and abusive men” (Cove 678). Consequently, Maria’s captivity amplifies her romantic tendencies: “[i]n her solitude, Maria contemplates ‘how difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits,’ reinforcing Wollstonecraft’s connection between the confinement of the mad and the limited sphere of women’s activity” (Cove 679-80). The narrator notes that Darnford is not an intellectually and emotionally reciprocal partner for Maria since “there was a volatility in his manner which often distressed her,” but her heightened sensibility overshadows her doubt: “love gladdened the scenes; besides, he was the most tender, sympathizing creature in the world” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 278). Unable to see Darnford’s flaws for what they really are, Maria instead attempts to learn from his character, as she is still impressed by his sensibility, a characteristic that “is more a reflection of Maria’s own sympathies” than Darnford’s character (Cove 679). Through Darnford’s behaviour, Maria attempts “to eradicate some of the romantic notions, which had taken root in her mind, while in adversity she had brooded over visions of unattainable bliss” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 278). Maria, then, through Darnford’s undesirable characteristics, attempts to reform her own romantic notions surrounding love and sentimentality founded in her androgynous education.

Seraphina is the only heroine who is able to rectify her relationship with her partner and be united with him in order to reform the family and society. Unlike Emma and Maria, who are unable to control their relationships with Augustus and Darnford, Seraphina is able to dictate her relationship with Henry through her constant refusal to accept his marriage proposals until he reforms his behaviour to match her own (Diachyshyn 82). Through denying Henry’s marriage

proposals, Seraphina is able “to manipulate the language of courtship, specifically the ability to deny or defer, in order to expose the gender-based shortcomings of society and establish her own autonomy” (Diachyshyn 94), which allows her to convince Henry of the need for him to reform his character so that they can be together. It is not until the end of the novel, after Seraphina has been kidnapped, that Henry understands the equality Seraphina proposes “on *her* own terms” (Diachyshyn 91):

‘[w]hatever is either mine *or* yours, is both yours *and* mine. When the knot of indissoluble union once is tied -- nay, when hearts are once actually united, the pronouns *my* and *thy* are, in this sense, obliterated and expunged -- it is *our* efforts, *our* earnings, *our* necessities from that day: -- *our* hopes, *our* fears; *our* solitudes, *our* happiness, or *our* woes!’ (Thelwall, *Daughter* 409)

With Henry’s cooperation, “she is able to realize the ambiguous goal posited by Mary Robinson ... women are ‘not the mere appendages of domestic life, but the partners, the equal associates of men’” (Diachyshyn 93).

Through dictating their relationship on the basis of reciprocal intellectual and emotional compatibility, Seraphina is able to retain her autonomy, though she laments the loss of personal pronouns in favour of the collective “our”:

‘[b]y and bye, Henry ... it shall be *our* projects, and *our* appointments: but, for the present, I am determined to enjoy at once the privileges of liberty and individuality, and cling to those dear -- delightful pronouns (ah! Poor departing friends! That must so soon be buried!) -- *me*, and *my*, and *mine*!’ (Thelwall, *Daughter* 411-12)

Seraphina’s sacrifice of her personal pronouns demonstrates the losses women must endure to be united with their partners in order to influence society.

While the heroines attempt to certify their place in patriarchal society through their relationships with men, in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Wrongs of Woman* they unfortunately choose men who are not willing to commit to them, either by marriage or preexisting habits, which limits the heroines' ability to form a socially sanctioned union that would allow them to influence society. Instead, Emma and Maria form platonic relationships with women in the isolation of the English countryside who help them (to a greater or lesser extent) raise their children.¹⁴ One of the key factors that threatens the heterosexual relationships is that "the men in many of the radical novels cannot supersede their (usually material) interests in the public world in favor of the more spiritual and mental ones that guide the domestic lives envisioned by the radical heroines" (Golightly 50). All of the heroines experience isolation and social ostracization as a result of their radical beliefs, and struggle to find a place for themselves within patriarchal society.

As a result of their radical beliefs, the heroines are isolated and unable to form meaningful relationships with their peers. However, it is not only the heroines who experience isolation: Hays also experienced a "dual alienation" from both men and women as a result of her "greater learning" (Sharma 148) Hays' isolation is replicated in her heroine Emma's isolation as her androgynous education "preclude[s] her from finding companions in women of her own age and background" (Sharma 148). Though Emma and Maria are not successful in their attempts to integrate into patriarchal society, these novels vindicating women's rights nonetheless epitomize

¹⁴ It is unclear in both *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Wrongs of Woman* to what extent these female companions aid the heroines in raising their children and further the heroines' quest in establishing social reform through the education of their children as these portions of the text are not fully developed. In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Emma's female companion, Rachel, is only mentioned in passing (Hays, *Memoirs* 218). In *The Wrongs of Woman*, the ending of the novel is unfinished, so it is unclear to what extent Jemima would have helped Maria educate her daughter.

“women’s representation in the symbolic order” (Rajan 152) of patriarchal society.¹⁵ Through their struggle to become independent, contributing members of society, the heroines demonstrate that isolation is not a viable option, and instead “emphasize the role of interpersonal relationships in constituting and sustaining individual selves, thereby expanding the place within ethical thought for such things as affect, emotion, and particularity” (Norton 304).

Following the dissolution of Emma’s relationship with Augustus, she is ostracized and unable to find work. She writes to her friend Mr Francis desiring his advice as to what to do next, only to be informed that “Mr Francis had quitted England” (Hays, *Memoirs* 191). Following this “new shock” Emma reaches out to a “former acquaintance,” hoping to obtain respectable employment as a teacher (Hays, *Memoirs* 191). However, she is “received by some with civility, by others with coldness” and is unable to procure respectable employment as her meager inheritance dwindles (Hays, *Memoirs* 191). As a result of her education and radical ideas, Emma is left to fend for herself, without the resources to do so and no one to help her, as she proclaims: “I seemed, as if in an immense desert [sic], a solitary outcast from society” (Hays, *Memoirs* 191). Coupled with Emma’s social isolation, her romantic inclinations induce her to “develo[p] a ‘sickly sensibility of [the] soul’ that serves to reinforce her isolation, rendering her, as she puts it on more than one occasion, ‘unfitted’ as an ‘inhabitant of the world’” (Norton 308). With no one willing to aid or support her, Emma is left with no options for respectable employment, and is unable to utilize her faculties in a meaningful way for the betterment of society. Emma blames her inability to find employment, and her only viable option to support herself, “the degradation of servitude,” on her formal education: “[h]apless woman! -- crushed by the iron hand of

¹⁵ See also Golightly’s *The Family, Marriage, and Radicalism in British Women’s Novels of the 1790s* and Norton’s “‘Emma Courtney’, Feminist Ethics, and the Problem of Autonomy” for further discussion on Emma’s and Maria’s representation of feminist beliefs in patriarchal society.

barbarous despotism, pampered into weakness, and trained the slave of meretricious folly!” (Hays, *Memoirs* 191). Her desire to be independent “tears away at her self-hood in significant ways, [and] is an accurate sociological descriptory of educationally maimed real-life women” (Sharma 161). She is determined to die rather than relinquish her independence: ““I will go to service -- I will work for my bread -- and, if I cannot procure a wretched sustenance -- *I can but die!*”” (Hays, *Memoirs* 195). In a similar burst of sentiment, Seraphina also desires to ““labour for myself,”” though she hints at the restraints society places on women and work: ““[c]an the attainments of solitude be turned to no account in this world of population? Were the accomplishments I owe to the fostering care of the generous Parkinson, designed only as superficial ornaments?”” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 252). Despite both heroines’ androgynous education, they are unable to rectify the predicament formal education and social expectations have placed on women. It is only through Emma’s reluctant marriage to Mr Montague (Hays, *Memoirs* 196), and Seraphina’s continued faith in Henry’s reformation, that both heroines are saved from death.

Though *The Wrongs of Woman* is unfinished, from the completed sections it can be inferred that Maria’s life, after choosing to “[take] a ready-furnished lodging [with Darnford], for she was above disguise” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 276), results in solitude and unhappiness for her. Her choice to value her own morals and “bypas[s] a legal ceremony by privileging their shared spiritual connection” (Markley 63) destroys “any chance of holding a ‘respectable’ position in society” (63). She is shunned because she has chosen not to hide her relationship with Darnford:

[h]ad she remained with her husband, practicing insincerity ... she would still have been visited and respected. If, instead of openly living with her lover, she could have condescended to call into play a thousand arts, which, degrading her own mind, might

have allowed the people who were not deceived, to pretend to be so, she would have been caressed and treated like an honourable woman. (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 277-8)

As discussed in previous chapters, Maria, in following her own morals and as a result of her self-education under the tutelage of her uncle, refutes societal norms which constrain women to their traditional, ornamental functions. However, despite her refusal to wait until her marriage with Venables is dissolved to begin her relationship with Darnford, and her choosing to live with Darnford out of wedlock, Maria still desires to marry him in the traditional sense:

Marriage, as at present constituted, she considered as leading to immorality -- yet, as the odium of society impedes usefulness, she wished to avow her affection to Darnford, by becoming his wife according to the established rules; not to be confounded with women who act from very different motives, though her conduct would be just the same without the ceremony as with it, and her expectations from him not less firm. (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 279)

Despite Maria's desire to live according to her own morals and beliefs, she still desires to be married, as without the title of "wife" her ability to utilize her education to reform others is useless.

Like Emma and Maria, Seraphina is also regulated by societal constraints regarding marriage. Even though she performs the duties of a wife, she must be publicly united with Henry in marriage in order to utilize her education and rhetorical skills to influence others. Following Henry's affair, Seraphina exclaims: "Isolated! Isolated! -- I am still but isolated! ... I have been, from my cradle upwards, a solitary being standing on a little island of my own" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 385). As a result of her androgynous education, Seraphina understands her place as a woman in patriarchal society, yet is unwilling to live by the established standards of English

society. While Henry continues to gamble and engage in destructive behaviour, Seraphina is placed in the difficult position of behaving as Henry's wife without the public sanction: "yet she determined from thence forward to sustain *the character* of a relationship, whose *duties* she was called upon to fulfill" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 400). Though Seraphina considers herself to be Henry's wife based on the bond the two had established on the Isle of Margot, and is frequently at his residence at Grosvenor-square following his repeated illnesses, she refuses to become his wife legally until he changes his behaviour:

[s]ituated as they were, a private marriage was no marriage at all, in her estimation. It was not the bond of security that she desired. ... The publicity -- the general recognition - - the open assumption of that rank and respectability in society which might give her virtues room to expand, and restore her to the free exercise of the utilities in which her soul delighted -- these were her objects -- her motives to the purposed marriage.

(Thelwall, *Daughter* 288)

As Henry frequently reverts to "his accustomed habits," Seraphina is forced into the position of "wife" without the title, and must live in solitude which is "rather too absolute" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 275). Her "growing desire of social intercourse -- the happiness that is to be enjoyed in a small circle of enlightened and congenial minds" (Thelwall, *Daughter* 275) emphasises her desire to debate with enlightened society, and to create her own family of like-minded individuals who would promote egalitarian values and morals to a greater population. Reminiscent of her debate with Morton over her need to act in accordance with her own morals, Seraphina, following her final stint as nurse and acting "wife," decides, similarly to Maria, that "she would be Henry's as publicly as she was wholly and entirely -- his friend, his mistress, *his wife*. -- That instead of repelling his importunities, she would claim his promise" (Thelwall,

Daughter 400). Through “claim[ing] his promise,” Seraphina determines to accept his promise of reform and loyalty to her regardless of the possibility of a relapse into poor behaviour.

However, like Maria, Seraphina understands that simply *acting* as Henry’s wife will not grant her a place in society she so desperately desires: the two must be legally married so that she can be accepted by society and end her isolation, as she argues to Henry: “[o]ur arrangements must now be final. I can no longer endure this state of agitation and suspense. I can no longer endure those racking emotions, and that eternal succession of embarrassments and calamities to which our unsettled and unauthorized connection is perpetually giving birth” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 402). Seraphina’s embarrassment and emotional turmoil caused by their separation and her isolation limits her sphere of activity, as “her space in society is both intellectually limiting and physically limited” (Diachyshyn 104). Her inability to be accepted by London society as a result of her radical ideas stemming from her androgynous education “emphasizes both her outsider persona and London culture’s initial inability to accept her” (Diachyshyn 101) without her legal marriage to Henry.

While Diachyshyn does attest that “Seraphina is more or less a recluse for large parts of the novel” (101), he nonetheless argues in favour of her mobility as “she inhabits a variety of shifting settings, from the remote tropical location of La Soufriere where she enters the plot, to the vacation in the ‘romantic mansion of Ridgmont’ in the Lake District that it resolves” (101). Seraphina does inhabit multiple spaces throughout the narrative; however, I argue her mobility is never public, and is therefore still censored by her radical beliefs and unwillingness to conform to social expectations. Unlike Emma and Maria, who inhabit -- or at least attempt to inhabit -- the public sphere and maintain their radical beliefs and morals, Seraphina never appears publicly either by herself or with anyone else. She inhabits “a neat cottage, in Somerstown” (Thelwall,

Daughter 245), resides at Grosvenor-square as a recluse, and travels briefly to the haunted mansion, where she is found on the isolated beach (arguably her most public appearance). Her brief stay at Emsley Hall is again secluded: she only interacts with other members of the family before she is reunited with Henry and returns to Grosvenor-square. While Emma and Maria actively attempt to regain their status in patriarchal society, Seraphina relies on Henry's promised reformation.

Each of the heroines' attempts to achieve a relationship outside of marriage is fruitless: it is only through marriage, and the creation of the family, that the heroines are able to educate their children in their desired morals, and by extension, society. The second half of the eighteenth century saw an increased interest in "individuals and their families. The role of the home, of family relationships, of kinship networks, and the individual in relation to these factors -- all are primary themes dominating the novels" (Golightly 34). Through marriage, women have greater control over themselves, their families, and their friends (Golightly 54). As Golightly and Thompson¹⁶ both attest, the heroines of these novels "emphasis[e] the importance of reform from within, from the most fundamental component of society, the family" (Golightly 47). Together with their partners, the heroines aspire to reform society through "a new family unit that exemplifies the harmonious and socially advantageous domesticity described in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*" (Golightly 43).

Through Emma's marriage to Mr Montague, she is able to utilize her intellectual abilities by studying medicine and even assisting her husband with surgeries (Gates 133). Because of her marriage, Emma is able to continue her studies and acts as a surgeon and "head of her own household" (Gates 133), events which lead to her final meeting with Augustus where she uses

¹⁶See Thompson's "Building Up the Family in *The Daughter of Adoption*" for more information regarding eighteenth-century perceptions regarding adoption and family.

her knowledge of surgery and medicine to care for him. Following Emma's medical attentions to Augustus, he finally confesses his love for her: "'I may, without a crime, tell you -- *that I have loved you.* -- Your tenderness early penetrated my heart -- aware of its weakness -- I sought to shun you'" (Hays, *Memoirs* 205). It is important to note that it is not Emma's intellectual abilities, or their mutual compatibility, that made him love her, but her "tenderness" or, perhaps a more fitting term, "fragility." Throughout his final admission of affection, Augustus never mentions her intelligence, but instead blames her "tenderness" and "weakness" for his inability to communicate his feelings for her. Their relationship is never actualized, and upon his death he leaves his son in Emma's care, whom she raises alongside her daughter as she "endeavored to form [their] young minds to every active virtue, to every generous sentiment" (Hays, *Memoirs* 218).

While unsuccessful in integrating herself into patriarchal society, through educating her children, biological and adopted, who bear the same names as their parents, Emma intends for them to actively use their abilities to do what she could not. In her letter to Augustus' son, Emma writes that the children "received, from the same masters, the same lessons, till you attained your twelve year; and my Emma emulated, and sometimes outstripped your progress" (Hays, *Memoirs* 218). The heroine's children receive the same androgynous education, and Emma works to "moderate and regulate" her daughter's passions as she recognizes this fault in her own education (Hays, *Memoirs* 218). However, Emma's dreams of having her daughter marry and form a family with Augustus' son are shattered when her daughter dies. Her final thoughts in her letter to her adopted son read: "[h]itherto there seems to have been something strangely wrong in the constitution of society -- a lurking poison that spreads its contagion far and wide ... But men begin to think and reason; reformation dawns, though the advance is tardy" (Hays, *Memoirs*

221). She places her hopes for the reformation of society on her adopted son, as she cautions him to “escap[e] from the tyranny of the passions, restored to reason” so that he may achieve what she was unable to do (Hays, *Memoirs* 221).

In the “minutes” outlined by Wollstonecraft prior to her death detailing her plans for the ending of the novel, Darnford is away from Maria in each chapter description, with the final chapter minutes detailing: ““Divorced by her husband -- Her lover unfaithful -- Pregnancy -- Miscarriage -- Suicide”” (*Maria* 286). That Wollstonecraft cannot conceive of a world where Maria would be an accepted and integrated member of society is denoted in chapter headings preceding this final conclusion. The ending, which Godwin notes “deviates from the preceding hints” has Maria attempt suicide as the only viable option left to her: “[s]he swallowed the laudanum; her soul was calm -- the tempest had subsided ... to fly from the anguish she had endured to escape from thought -- from this hell of disappointment” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 286). However, Maria does not succeed in ending her life, and is saved by Jemima who reunites her with her daughter (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 287). Though the novel remains unfinished, it can be assumed that Maria and Jemima together endeavor to educate Maria’s daughter with the aspiration that she may, like Emma’s adopted son Augustus, be able to reform society.

Seraphina is able to convince those around her of her radical morals and beliefs, and is able to ““build a family ... who bring [children] up in social equality and reciprocal love”” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 474). Through her reformed family, Seraphina is able to influence people outside the family unit, as she hopes their egalitarian morals will eventually grow to include ““the universe”” as ““our family!”” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 475). As she explains to Dr. Pengarron, “[w]e will endeavor, however, to keep it in view, that, by straining towards this highest of excellence, we may at least attain some of those subordinate eminences of liberty and social

virtue, which, without the assistance of such efforts, we might have failed to reach” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 475).

Seraphina has good reason to wish to reform her family, as it is revealed that she is pregnant, and through educating her child and building her family, she would be able to influence future generations. In addition to her marriage with Henry, Seraphina welcomes Dr Pengarron to her family, as she promises “to let Pengarron give his name to their firstborn” (Thompson, *Building* 10). In a fantastic twist, Seraphina is reunited with her foster father, Parkinson, and his wife, Amanda, and they too are added to her ever-growing family (Thompson, *Building* 10). It is through her marriage to Henry, and the establishment of the reformed family that Seraphina is able to solidify her and her children’s place in patriarchal society with the intent to reform society from within.

Each of the heroines attempts through her androgynous education to reform patriarchal society. Unable to accomplish this radical feat on their own, the heroines build on their formal education with the skills developed in their self-education, including reading texts normally reserved for a masculine education, in order to engage in debates to persuade their peers and partners to aid them in creating an egalitarian society that is beneficial to the independence of both sexes. Emma’s hopes for the intended reformation of society are placed initially on the marriage of her children, though following the death of her daughter they are solely placed on her son. The ending of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* remains ambiguous as to whether her son is able to manage his sensibility and inspire meaningful societal reform based on his androgynous education under Emma’s supervision. Maria similarly wishes to challenge patriarchal social norms through the androgynous education of her daughter. Both heroines raise their children with the help of a female platonic partner, in a same-sex dyad which challenges the patriarchal

structure of the family unit. In this way, both Emma and Maria in their untraditional creation of a radical, matriarchal family are able to disrupt societal norms of what constitutes a family. The success of these same-sex dyad-led families in reforming patriarchal society remains ambiguous at the ends of the novels, though there is no suggestion that the children are not educated ““in social equality and reciprocal love”” (Thelwall, *Daughter* 474). Seraphina, in the creation of a family unit through her marriage to Henry, is granted a socially sanctioned place in society to influence change. However, Seraphina’s family is not what eighteenth-century contemporaries would have considered the traditional family unit. The inclusion of her foster parents and Dr. Pengarron among other members of the community and beyond disrupts the traditional, accepted formation of the patriarchal family. Seraphina, like Emma and Maria, is able through her androgynous education to reform the patriarchal family unit, and by extension, the patriarchy, while maintaining her radical morals and beliefs.

Through examining the philosophical and political works of eighteenth-century contemporary writers I have endeavored to elucidate the ways in which these texts have influenced the radical novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and John Thelwall who rebelled against prescribed notions of femininity and women’s traditional place in patriarchal society. By tracing each heroine’s education from their formal education where they received an education typical to the period as is explored in conduct books and children’s educational literature, to their self-education where they read material reserved for a masculine education and engaged in debates with members of both sexes, I have shown how this androgynous education influenced their behaviour, beliefs, motives, and morals through deconstructing the endings of each novel and each heroine’s successes and failures in relation to achieving a place in patriarchal society equal to men.

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