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## **A Study of the Early American Author Judith Sargent Murray, Her Role in Early American Print Culture and Her Misappropriation by Twentieth-Century Feminism**

Robert Allen Fowler  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

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## ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE EARLY AMERICAN AUTHOR JUDITH SARGENT MURRAY,  
HER ROLE IN EARLY AMERICAN PRINT CULTURE AND HER  
MISAPPROPRIATION BY TWENTIETH-CENTURY FEMINISM

by Robert Allen Fowler

December 2011

In 1798, Judith Sargent Murray published a three-volume collection of one hundred miscellaneous essays on topics ranging from social politesse to women's education to international politics. Her diligence, forethought and manipulation of pseudonyms in the print-hungry post-Revolutionary America create a unique place for her in the history of American letters. However, in the twentieth century, modern feminism has attempted to claim Murray as one of their own, choosing between one and four examples of her work as proof of her forward-looking philosophy, while ignoring significant pieces of those same works as well as much of her oeuvre as a whole which espouse much more firmly the place of the woman in the home.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout any paper, parenthetical references can become rather nightmarish when one author is quoted from so many sources. In the case of Judith Sargent Murray, her letter books are constantly being transcribed and printed in book form. Below is a reference to the full names of the books so unmercifully shortened to aid in reading the paper:

<i>Catechism</i>	<i>Universalist Catechism of 1782</i>
<i>F100L</i>	<i>Judith Sargent Murray: Her First 100 Letters</i>
<i>GtoP</i>	<i>From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Excerpts</i>
<i>LLL</i>	<i>Letters of Loss and Love: Letter Book Three</i>
<i>Selected</i>	<i>Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray</i>

Also, in keeping with the latest trend in Murray scholarship, material from Murray's magnum opus *The Gleaner* has an additional parenthetical notation. Accompanying the standard MLA format of author/title, volume number and page number, one will find the actual essay number as well. For example, when one sees (*Gleaner* 3: 74: 58), it will be apparent that the reference is to *The Gleaner*, Volume 3, Essay 74, Page 58.

## INTRODUCTION

Judith Sargent Murray was an eighteenth-century poet, essayist, novelist, playwright and religious liberal whose voice is only now being heard again. Though the chief example of her published work was available in the form of a book entitled *The Gleaner*, published in 1798, it was not until the modern women's movement and the increase in feminist studies that her work and life have begun to be reexamined. This fact, along with the discovery of her twenty letter books in the mid-nineteen-eighties, has truly ignited a scholarship that, over the course of the last two decades, has grown exponentially. Initially, ownership of Murray's intellectual canon was sought out by Universalist historians and both Early American and feminist literary scholars, all anxious to include Murray in the foundations of their respective movements. However, as is now known, Murray was much more than any of these groups can easily classify. She was a devout Universalist who annoyed her contemporary Universalists to the point of exasperation; she was a published writer in the 1790s whose style can vary from sublime to awkward in a single essay; and she was an eighteenth-century woman who believed unequivocally and paradoxically in the equality of the feminine intellect and in a woman knowing her place. Knowledge of Murray as a more complete individual can only aid those who wish to benefit from a fuller, more dimensional reading of her work.

Throughout her life, Murray described herself always as someone untutored and unlettered, but her writing creates quite a different impression. Especially where her essays are concerned, Murray displays a passion for her subject and an intellectual zeal that prompted even the notice of a United States president (or two)<sup>1</sup>. Her stance on the

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<sup>1</sup> George and Martha Washington purchased one set of *The Gleaner*. John and Abigail Adams purchased two (*Gleaner* 3: 319-28).

social and educational neglect of women in pre- and certainly post-Revolutionary America was firm and unwavering. But unlike Athena, Murray did not spring fully-formed from the forehead of a god. No, for all her attempts to destroy her juvenilia and present the calmer, unified front of which she was so fond, Murray was, in fact, the product of her environment.

Given what is now known of Murray's life, one cannot easily dismiss what is evidently an innate intelligence and diligence on the part of the young Judith. Her hunger for knowledge notwithstanding, however, the merest research yields areas of influence that would create the Judith Sargent Murray that is now studied by scholars in the fields of religious and feminist history and American literature. Murray's family was perhaps her single most important influence. The opinions of her parents and siblings were held in the highest regard, to her delight and chagrin. Puritanism, both as the family religion and the predominant social religion of Massachusetts, also shaped Murray's environment even before she was born. As she grew in the church and its teachings, the influence of the Enlightenment, specifically of John Locke<sup>2</sup>, became quite apparent, especially in her theories on women's education. Also, the new Universalist religion would be a blanket influence over Murray's entire life. Judith, with her family, converted to Universalism when she was just eighteen and she would eventually become the wife of the first Universalist minister in the United States.

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<sup>2</sup>Locke's work and the work of the Puritan ecclesiastical circles were bound to overlap. Throughout Locke's writings, one finds a preoccupation with both reason and religious revelation. The Puritan clergy were also fascinated with these "two possible sources of all knowledge" (Dworetz 138). The Puritan fathers were always very concerned with the intellectual health of their congregations. Puritanism strove to maintain the highest levels of literacy and rationality in its followers. Puritans were expected to be, not only literate, but well-versed and self-reflective based on the Scriptures they read (Miller 77). There are several instances where Locke is quoted almost verbatim in sermons or other public Puritan forums. Only one such example concerns John Barnard in 1743, who referred to reason as "the candle of the Lord which He hath set up in us," quoting Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, wherein he reinterpreted Proverbs 20:27 in a more Enlightenment vein (Dworetz 139-140).

Another influence on the maturing Murray and her political views and writings was the American Revolution itself. Like so many new Americans, she was proud of the accomplishments of her new country, yet continually disappointed with those leaders who were still unwilling to go farther with regard to the ideals of legal and intellectual equality for all Americans, especially women.

To know something of what she would become, Murray's story begins long before her birth. To fully understand the import of her contributions, one must first cultivate an idea of the society, of the world, into which she was born. Before Murray arrived on the fifth of May, 1751, the Sargent family and its various branches had been in this area of Massachusetts for over a century. Murray's family in America began around 1640 with the arrival of her mother's earliest recorded colonial relative, Thomas Saunders of England. He settled in Cape Ann, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Personally, he is recorded as being upright and industrious; professionally, he was a shipwright of some renown. Some thirty-eight years later, in 1678, Judith's earliest recorded paternal colonial ancestor arrived. William Sargent was also an Englishman who settled in Gloucester (Hurd Smith *LLL* 15).

Traveling and trading across the Atlantic was huge business; and, in the northeastern colonies, many people made a good living from the water. Both the Saunders and the Sargents were such families. Though not terribly urbane, both families provided well for themselves and their families on these harsh Massachusetts shores (Skemp 15). In fact, Murray's father, Captain Winthrop Sargent, early became a prominent merchant and ship-owner, greatly improving upon the fortunes of his own father, Epes Sargent (Field 10). At the age of 23, in 1750, he married Judith Saunders, the daughter of Captain Thomas Saunders, son of the shipwright Thomas Saunders

(Field 12).

From very early in her life, Judith's place in Gloucester society was apparent to her. Not only did she have the obvious economic benefits that have previously been mentioned, but both her father and grandfather were "public-spirited men" who had taken "a leading part among those who [had] worked for the advancement of education and culture in Gloucester" (Field 15). In addition to their public and generous natures, both the Sargents and the Saunders were both members of the First Parish Church, the Calvinist church not far from Murray's family home. Judith Saunders Sargent was, from all accounts, earnest in her religion, and it was perhaps from Murray's mother's side that she developed her life-long interest in spirituality (Field 13).

Having noted the families' interest in education, Vena Field's early research about Murray's own education has now been subjected to much speculation, if not outright denial. In 1931, Field wrote that, because of her parents' respect and admiration for education, "that Judith Sargent was given all the educational advantages that her parents could provide" (15). Like so many families of this economic bracket, there were newer ideas about what constituted the proper rearing of children. One idea of which the Sargents were quite fond concerned sending their sons to Harvard. Although Murray herself would readily admit that her father was more comfortable on the deck of his ship, he was literate and did correspond on occasion. In fact, the first letter of her first letter book, dated 03 November 1765, is addressed "To my father" (*F100L 23*).

The Harvard process began for her brothers when Judith, the oldest child, was twelve years old. Her brother Winthrop, only ten, was enrolled in the Boston Latin School to receive the beginnings of a classical education (Skemp 19). Though she could not articulate it at the time, Murray would later write about her frustration with being

uneducated simply because she was female. Later, familial references to gendered inequality would insinuate their way into her most famous essay, “On the Equality of the Sexes,” as well. In a letter written in 1786, she describes herself as having been a “wild and untutored youth” (qtd. in Skemp 23). Given the rest of that letter in particular and her obsession with correspondence and literature in general, the claim seems more emotional hyperbole to her perceived slight, rather than actual truth. In fact, this early educational slight would be a mental stain on her entire life.

Thankfully, the Sargents were more or less receptive to the educational demands of their children. In her youth, Murray was educated by tutors: first, an elderly “ill-taught” woman and, succeeding her, a “superstitious gloomy pastor” (*F100L* 31). Contrary to Vena Field’s assumption that Murray was educated with her brothers, we find that, in many cases, she was educated by her brother. Her brother Winthrop, with whom she was always close, would actually teach her and share with her some of the education that he had received while away at Harvard. In addition, Murray taught herself a lot. Having been taught to read with her brothers because she would have it no other way, the willful Murray taught herself more by reading in the Sargent family library. Her thirst for knowledge of any kind was extraordinary. From all accounts, the Sargents had an extensive library, aided greatly by their trans-Atlantic trade, where she would read and reread her favorites or write diatribes against her hated literary enemies. Not only that, but Murray would purchase or borrow books as often as she could. Her appetite for knowledge was unquenchable and truly remarkable. One of her favorites was *The Oeconomy of Human Life in Two Parts*, in which she scribbled “the best book that ever was written” (Dunlop, *F100L* 13). At the opposite end of the spectrum, Rousseau was a particularly hated volume because of his misogynistic stance on the

education of women. Again, of her educational deficit, Murray wrote much later, “I shall feel the effects of this irrational deprivation, as long as I shall continue an inhabitant of this world” (*Selected* xvi). And, indeed, she did.

Not only did she feel undereducated in a general sense, but the fact that her education suffered at the hands of a society that undervalued the intellectual contributions of women on simply the basest of biological differentiation was abhorrent to her. In her landmark essay “On the Equality of the Sexes,” Murray views young women as offerings to a misogynistic society, sacrificed upon the alter of illogical tradition:

After we have from early youth been adorned with ribbons, and other gewgaws, dressed out like the ancient victims previous to sacrifice, being taught by the case of our parents in collecting the most showy materials that the ornamenting our exterior ought to be the principal object of our attention; after, I say, fifteen years thus spent, we are introduced into the world. (*Selected* 9)

Murray continues in “Equality” that this lack of proper education and, by extension, proper judgment, is wholly detrimental to female happiness. In a letter written in the summer of 1777, addressed to John Murray (whom she would later marry), Murray ends a list of unfortunate personal events against which she felt helpless with the phrase, “It is only at this point that I allow the inequality of sex--Education, if not Nature renders us Cowards” (*F100L* 65). This quote also suggests the social hierarchy into which Murray was born and is not the only time that she herself would equate femininity with weakness.

Her occasional moments of weakness aside, Murray was a prominent advocate

of what psychologists now call “self-esteem.” Murray’s favorite phrase, sprinkled throughout her personal and published work, was “Reverence yourself.” In a letter to her niece Anna, Murray used the phrase, as she would on so many occasions, as a reminder to maintain high personal standards in a potentially hard world: “There is a dignity of comportment proper to our sex--Young calls upon us to ‘Reverence ourselves’--that genuine delicacy which should always distinguish the conduct of young ladies” (*Selected* 93). The phrase, her motto, was not, however, her creation. Though this phrase is often mistakenly attributed to Murray as her own, the Gleaner persona adopted later by Murray would gladly give credit where credit is due. The “Young” to whom she refers is the author Edward Young, who used the phrase in his book *Conjectures on Original Composition* in 1759 (Harris, *Selected* 93).

Murray herself would also take this advice to heart. Being educated and as fascinated by literature and print as she was, Murray felt that the only logical way to accurately reverence herself would be to become an author. Murray was quite aware of the fact that the printed word, from colonial religious tracts to European best sellers, had shaped the person that she was. As an author, she too could disseminate, in whatever way possible, her theories for the betterment of the human condition.

In chapter one, Murray’s work, good or bad, takes lesser focus perhaps than her agency. Murray’s fascination with the printed word, foreign and domestic, ancient to modern, influenced her style greatly. She chose the essay as her primary form of literary expression, which opened many doors for stylistic experimentation over the years. Her novella *The Story of Margareta* is written as a series of essays, constructed rather like personal correspondence to the public at large, installed over the course of almost two years in *The Massachusetts Magazine* (Harris, *Selected* xxxii). Of this experimentation,

Chester Jorgenson suggests that “[although] she was covetous of fame as an author of belles-lettres, she attempted no definition of her esthetic” (74). Paul Lewis is less diplomatic in his modern reading: “Although Murray worked in several genres, [her work] demonstrates that for the most part she failed to appreciate the opportunities they offer” (275). Lewis also goes on to say that a critical reading of Murray’s work “[reveals] a lack of stylistic accomplishment” on the part of the author (275).

Good or bad, Murray’s awareness of the power of post-Revolutionary print culture is notable and she attempted to take advantage of it. Her most prolific publishing decade was the 1790s. With some few notable exceptions, like her self-published *Catechism*<sup>3</sup> in 1782 and her essay “Desultory Thoughts” in 1785, all of her published submitted essays hit presses sporadically throughout the 1790s under a variety of pseudonyms. Whether as “Constantia,” or the “Gleaner,” or even the seldom-used “Reaper,” Murray created a variety of pseudonyms. Her pseudonyms, particularly male ones, were initially employed to deflect attention from the author to the work. Later, in 1798, she would officially forgo the masculine mask, claiming all of *The Gleaner*’s essays (which included the serialized *Margaretta* novella, two plays, and a series of educational and political essays) as the work of “Constantia” (Hurd Smith, *LLL* 22-23).

In her published work, too, one finds conscious acknowledgements of print culture itself and its effects on society. *The Story of Margaretta* ends happily because someone reads the story in *The Massachusetts Magazine* (*Gleaner* 1: Essays 28-29).

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<sup>3</sup>The complete title of Murray’s catechism is *Some Deductions from the System Promulgated in the Page of Divine Revelation Ranged in the Order and Form of a Catechism: Intended as an Assistant to the Christian Parent or Teacher*.

Characters in her plays actually discuss defending themselves against notoriety inflicted on them by an abusive newspaper press (3: 83: 150). Murray even found herself embroiled in a bitter published letter writing feud with a critic of her work which caused John Murray a great deal of public and congregational embarrassment (Skemp 269). Whether reading a new novel or writing a scathing letter to the editor, Murray was well aware of how the public printed word could affect the personal.

Chapter II parses Murray's more recent provenance as the voice of late eighteenth-century feminism. Though modern scholars do consider Murray one of the most prominent female writers of the new republic, much has also been written about the "feminist" tone of some of her work. As an intelligent and discriminating woman of the late eighteenth century, Murray did hold strong views with regard to female education. Because she felt tragically slighted with regard to her own education, many of her essays plead with the public, inducing them to reconsider the size of the woman's domestic sphere, enlarging that sphere to include education of a much higher caliber. Again, she begs women to "reverence themselves," hoping to ignite within the female bosom a desire for independence and liberal intelligence (*Gleaner* 3: Essays 88-91, etc.).

Generally, even the slightest mention of Murray refers to her "feminism." In the anthology *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800*, the sole essay included, "On the Equality of the Sexes," is heralded as her "feminist manifesto," written thirteen years before Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Jehlen 874). These claims, though not necessarily untrue within the context of the anthology, do create a more daring picture of Murray than was probably true. (In addition, though the essay was written in 1779, it was not published until 1790, only two years prior to

Wollstonecraft.)

Modern feminists must consider the entirety of Murray's oeuvre before actively including her one or two strongly worded essays on the subject of female education within the canon of historical feminism. Murray was also an active proponent of what is now referred to as Republican Motherhood. Writing within the confines of what she considered her genteel sphere, Murray often softened the tone of her most forward-looking pieces for publication; and, upon close reading, even her most gynocentric works still instruct the intended female readers to educate themselves in order to procure better and intelligent husbands to produce better and intelligent children. Though no modern disparagement is intended toward these roles of wife and mother in and of themselves, Murray's writings promote those roles above all else. She is consumed with the idea of the domestic power of the woman, suggesting that women, while not actively involved in public life or politics, still wield the incredible power of influencing their husbands and children to those ends. In her private life, especially with regard to her husband and his congregation, when active participation is required outside the domestic sphere, Murray often displays a great reticence that undermines the authority of her written words. Even in her published work, the strong female characters of Margareta and Mrs. Montague still project a dependence and obeisance to contemporary patriarchalism that resists easy categorization in the feminist canon (Skemp 213-214; Lewis 275).

Much to the chagrin of those historians and scholars who would happily categorize her work into one easily identifiable box, Judith Sargent Murray refused to be completely bound by the social structures that surrounded her. She pushed some boundaries while reinforcing others. Murray's worlds of reason and chaos, peace and

savagery, election and denigration, faith and fear would roil, turn and temper within the intellect of this one woman. But no matter what her innate tendencies, and there were a few, Murray was still a product of her time. In this brief intellectual biography, we see a woman who was born into a society literally created by and for Puritans, at just the moment that the writings of John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers were beginning to be preached, into a wealthy family able to take advantage of its position to educate its children and worldly enough to be religiously liberal. This confluence of events cannot be overlooked when describing the writer, the playwright, the wife, the mother, the American, the woman who was Judith Sargent Murray.

## CHAPTER I

## INTIMATE STRANGERS: MURRAY AND THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

Even the Romans could not have envisioned a democratic republic like the emerging United States. Not only was the new nation's government revolutionary in conception, but the social, cultural and economic drives of the new nation were revolutionary also. Print culture had literally helped create the nation and print continued to grow exponentially in the decades surrounding the Revolution. Several factions of society got caught up in the whirlwind of print culture. Judith Sargent Murray, as a writer and thinker, evolved from a fascinating combination of several of the "factions": she was well-educated, reared in mercantile class comfort, a patriot, a religious liberal in Puritan New England, and a woman. And she wrote prolifically on behalf of them all. Her desires to be acknowledged as an intellectual equal to man, to create a respect for education within young women and to receive the literary fame she so craved could only be achieved in and through print. Even as she tiptoed through the social minefield of eighteenth-century gender bias, publishing so much of her work under the literary guise of a man, she never lost the focus of her greatest belief: men and women are spiritually and intellectually equal. Though both contemporary and modern critics may question the quality of her writing, her dedication to her ideals, her dedication to her sex, her dedication to print and her belief in its elevating potential can never be doubted.

Born in the fires of the Revolution and the desire for nationalism, freedom and profit, printing was the voice of the new country. The United States took English from the empire but gave the language to the people, giving the populace a voice that has only gotten stronger as the years have passed. Judith Sargent Murray was keenly aware

of the power of print. In fact, Murray was extremely conscious of the impact of every form of public dissemination, from the newspaper or magazine to the novel to the play to the sermon. She, as well as other notable women, would take advantage of the new liberal presses of America to express themselves on a host of issues from the intellectual equality of the sexes to the new American theater to the proper role of America on the international political scene.

Ironically, for the growing “republic of letters,” resources were scarce in the late seventeenth century. Printers were extremely cautious and unwilling to venture too much capital on a risky literary venture (Amory 1: 142). In fact, in the seventeenth century, American printing (or what would modernly be called “publishing”) was still largely a European affair. The presses may have been physically in the colonies, but “American imprints often relied on European authors for their texts and on European presses, paper and type for their production” (Amory 1: 7). Additionally, the English presses also continued to supply the transatlantic trades as much as possible. According to James Raven in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, “[from] 1700 to 1780, 45 percent of English book exports by volume departed for the American mainland and the West Indies” (Amory 1: 183). These facts are perhaps not surprising if one assumes that the majority of the colonists did speak English, but again, in addition to speaking, one must remember the predominant New England Puritan social stance on literacy as a duty of the responsible citizen, thereby enabling, if not necessarily encouraging, the populace to absorb the printed word (Miller 66). In fact, given the high level of literacy among New England Protestants, the North American colonies were probably the most literate society at the time. Not only did the Puritans establish Harvard college within six years of their arrival in 1630, but also brought over the first printing press in 1639.

Therefore, the commitment to the printed work and its circulation were part of the early establishment of the nation.

Many Americans still connected book ownership and certainly book accumulation with a sense of luxury, if not dissipation. The ability to own books was a status symbol in and of itself, since book ownership suggested first, literacy, and second, disposable income. In the New England of the seventeenth century, virtually no booksellers existed outside of Boston. Additionally, excepting “primers, hornbooks, almanacs, catechisms” and “other Small books,” there were not many books available for purchase (Amory 2: 103). “The sale of anything more diverse than Bibles, primers, psalmbooks and almanacs,” writes David Hall, “followed wealth and population density, the same factors associated with literacy” (Amory 2: 103). Furthermore, novel reading was “denounced by politicians, theologians, and educators as inherently frivolous, fallacious, and inflammatory” (Amory 2: 444). The pietist’s proscriptions against the novels’ unsavory effect on young women, in particular, made such “leisure reading” even more suspect and unsavory (Amory 2: 444). In one rather humorous moment, Murray acknowledges this prejudice against the novel in her novella *The Story of Margaretta*. Mary Vigillius, Margaretta’s adoptive mother, warns her of the machinations of the aptly-named suitor Sinisterus Courtland. She writes, “Say, my charming reasoner [Margaretta], would these over nice distinctions, for which you cannot find a name, ever have found entrance into the bosom of a virtuous girl, were it not for that false taste which is formed by novel reading?” (*Gleaner* 1: 9: 91). This particular piece of advice not only shows Murray’s familiarity with the current social mores, but also demonstrates her ability to write in an appropriate character for her audience. In many cases, one can trace this ability to her family and their many social

and familial associations with whom she communicated frequently.

The Sargents are a wonderful example of a family located at the epicenter of several overlapping social spheres from employment and monetary level to education and new colonial protestant liberalism. Judith's father was able to not only bring back an odd collection of European books from his extensive travels to various transatlantic port towns, but he also could afford to buy books when at home. Accordingly, the Sargents were a family perfectly situated to not only accumulate books, but also to want to. Murray's mother, "Judith, Sr.," who descended from the more educated Saunders family, could also both read and write quite well and left her daughter her own small collection of literature (Skemp 23; Field 12). Additionally, well into Murray's early married life with Stevens, she was constantly borrowing or trading books with others to further expand her intellectual base (Skemp 23). Murray's voracious intellectual appetite never abated and she used all of her mental resources to create, to glean so many things that would find their way into her own writing.

Murray does an exemplary job of blurring the line of her dual literary heritage. On the one hand, as a colonial American, she would have been inundated with the variety of religious literature available to her, both foreign and domestic (Amory 1: 142). In fact, this domestic religious publication, so heavily influenced by New World Protestantism still causes huge debate over the quality of its very literariness. David Hall explains the phenomenon of the "Puritan Imagination" as the development of a "vernacular," "plain" style that emphasizes truth and an economy of language that "must not be construed to mean that the Puritan literary aesthetic was truncated or inadequate," but, rather "attempted to replicate the transformative power of the Word" (Amory 1: 142-144). This may well be the case and a beautiful explication of the

sometimes austere, documentary quality of many of Murray's writings.

And yet, to suggest that Murray owes her intellectual base to the Puritan influence is inadequate. She read and reread deeply and broadly European literature, including the standards: Shakespeare and Locke. She charged through translations of Aristotle and Plato. She reveled in Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. She enjoyed Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. She cheered as she read Anne Wharton, Lady Damaris Masham and Mary Astell. She decried all things Rousseau. She indulged in hosts of European romances (much to her mother's chagrin), and she was absolutely illuminated by James Rely's *Union* (Skemp 23-25). The agglomeration of literary influences would continually shape and temper the tastes of the maturing Murray. Ironically, even as both she and Noah Webster advocated the creation of an "American English," she continually strove for and praised any writer who might achieve the style of her European literary favorites.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, an examination of Murray's writing reveals a deft ability to synthesize the predominant "plain style" of native colonial publications and the more robust imaginings of her European imports. The most ample proof comes from her magnum opus *The Gleaner*, but there is evidence of her style and influences as early as her earliest printed work. Within her *Catechism*, for example, in answer to the question, "But Jesus Christ says of the person who was to betray him, it had been better for him

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<sup>4</sup> While the new patriots all hoped to develop the national voice, using the tongue of another nation, the question of linguistic standards was ever present. The English, who had used their native tongue for so long and so well, were of necessity the initial barometer of American literary quality. In volume one of *The Gleaner*, Murray laments that she will ultimately be unable to achieve "the smoothness of Addison's page, the purity, strength and correctness of Swift, [and] the magic numbers of Pope . . ." (14) She would go on to praise other American writers who more successfully imitated or embodied the spirit of these "Augustan models" (Jorgenson 74).

that he had never been born: Did not Judas betray him?" (16). We see Murray using a combination of her rational argumentation derived both from the rhetors that she had studied in combination with the Calvinism of her youth and adding the literature that she loved so much. Murray answers the question as follows:

There is heavenly wisdom in all our Lord's sayings, Judas certainly betrayed his Master, and proved by his subsequent agonies, the truth of our Lords' assertion; for had he given up the Ghost before he came into this world, he would have escaped all that exquisite distress, he was doomed, while here to suffer. The poet beautifully expresses the situation of an infant, translated into the heavenly world before, or soon after it became a tenant of pain, in these lines--

Babes thither caught from womb and breast,  
Claim right to sing above the rest,  
Because they found the happy shore,  
They never say nor sought before.

Thus it was possible for Judas, to have partook [sic] of happiness, without being born into this state of misery. (*Catechism* 16)

Not only does she reference a list of scripture previously noted in the *Catechism*, but she also throws in a hint of deduction based on her studies of Universalism and a stanza from the popular poem "The Believer's Principles" by the Reverend Ralph Erskine ("Ralph Erskine"). Murray was writing at her dutiful best, translating the doctrines of her new religion into a Biblically researched, logically organized, and literarily ornamented pedagogical package.

Murray's *Catechism*, a slender first foray into the world of print, whetted her

appetite for publication. Fortunately, after the American Revolution, whether we speak of book production, poetry or play publishing, or almanacs and newspapers, the printed word was everywhere. The presses were also in need of something to print. However, the problem of making a foreign mother tongue one's own plagued native writers. Self-consciously American authors had to contend with comparisons to older, respected English traditions with regard to their new work. If Shakespeare, Pope and Addison were great, could the literature of the colonies be as good without patterning themselves or copying Old World systems? As a result, the American literary marketplace sought its own literary voice as a nation. Attempting to expand its voice beyond the European standards of literature, post-Revolutionary American presses were much more willing to print anything from an American hand. Contrary to what may have been said about the quality of early American literature, the desire to print (and sell) it was indisputable. As has been noted, Murray agreed with Noah Webster when he wrote in 1783 that "America must be as independent in literature as she is in politics" (qtd. in Warner 122). Like Webster, Murray, ever the idealist patriot, called for a distinctly American usage of the English language. "National attachment should," she wrote, "dictate the studious cultivation of a national language [ . . . ] to erect a standard, to raise, to dignify, to perfect and to polish a common tongue" (qtd. in Eldred 181). By the 1780s and 1790s, it was commonplace for printers to advertise the citizenry of the author above the content of the work. Americans should buy American, they pleaded, not because the work was exceptional, but because it was American (Warner 120).

A particularly prolific and expansive print medium was the newspaper. Newspapers, whose circulation increased constantly throughout the period, were always welcoming of well-written native articles. According to Charles Clark, American

colonial newspaper titles nearly doubled in the decade preceding the Revolution and more than doubled again in the decade and a half after. By 1790, ninety-nine newspapers were being published weekly from sixty-two separate towns and cities. Before the war, pamphlets like Paine's "Common Sense" were a unifying dissemination of nationalist and political ideas. After the war, newspapers were being viewed as they would for the next two centuries, "the best existing instrument of a shared community consciousness" (Amory 1: 361).

However, the use of the language would have to be different, and, indeed, it was. With their colonial religious heritage intact and strong, American writers developed a very pragmatic, direct approach to language and literature. The printers of the era sought to create "Americans" by trying to create a sense of nationalism and worth that would result in a voice as a separate country on a separate continent under a separate government. In this new land, this new attitude, this new freedom, printers and publishers opened their doors and presses to the voices of their infant country.

One group anxious to be heard in this new era of print was women. According to Joanne Dobson and Sandra Zagarell, the three most influential women in print in 1790 were Mercy Otis Warren, Sarah Wentworth Morton and Judith Sargent Murray (Amory 2: 364). A few like Sarah Wentworth Morton enjoyed seeing their poetry in print in the monthly magazines that were becoming so popular. Others, like Mercy Otis Warren, thrilled at the thought of political freedom and the independence promulgated by the nationalist presses. Still others, like Judith Sargent Murray, were intrigued with the possibility of feminine intellectual equality and the laurels of literary recognition. Indeed, Morton, Warren, and Sargent, along with so many other women of the late eighteenth century took advantage of this print-friendly age. Later, as the novel began to

come into its own as a form, women in particular excelled: Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* are not only two well-known examples from the period, but also two of the bestselling works of the period.<sup>5</sup>

Murray, along with Morton, Warren and others, would stand at the forefront of women's words printed in early America. And these Revolutionary and Early Republic Era women had plenty to say. While Mercy Warren created fires of political unrest between Federalists and Democratic Republicans, Judith Sargent Murray, in several of her most famous essays, made a compelling and rational (though perhaps not fiery) argument for the betterment of the fair sex by education and independence. For Murray and so many others, the printed word created the voice with which anyone could be heard. Printing had the power to shape society and the world. Printed material, in this era, "was a principle vehicle not only of public debate but also of the dissemination of information and opinion: it was a major medium of education, religion and entertainment; and it was recognized as instrumental in forging an American identity and the complement of identity, a national culture" (Amory 2: 367). This was the power of print.

The age of the new republic was perhaps the most politically aware era in American history. Everyone seemed to have a stake in the new nation and Murray was ever on guard with regard to political matters. Though John Murray had actually served

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<sup>5</sup>The most successful "American" novel of this period was Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*. In fact, this novel was not an "American" production at all, having been written and first published in London. This fact made the book ineligible for American copyright. While Rowson scholar Cathy Davidson feels secure in the book's success because of its relatable and sympathetic protagonist (xii), James Green thinks he may know the key to Charlotte's success: "From 1801 to 1803, *Charlotte* was printed in twelve editions. Why people read the book the open for debate, why publishers manufactured the book was not: it was set in America, it was short and cheap; and it was in the public domain" (Amory 2:102-103). This combination of a good story at a good price was an effective combination, to say the least.

for a short time as chaplain for the Rhode Island regiments, his interests after the Revolutionary War were more spiritual than political. Judith Murray was the more forthright politico of the home, which was a precarious position for the woman of the house to occupy in the late eighteenth century. Along with other American founding mothers, she was excited by the prospect of a nation that held human rights, liberty and the ability to pursue happiness so dear. In spite of the nonexistent role of the female in the body politic, many women thought of this new national era as a time of beginnings and freedom, physically as well as intellectually. Some of Murray's best essays concern politics, both in the new America and abroad.

Though Murray was ever concerned that the reader could determine her sex from the way she wrote about a given topic, this concern was certainly tempered in her political essays. Generally speaking, there is a certain easy-going, personable quality to Murray's Gleaner persona, Mr. Vigillius. Throughout the entirety of *Margaretta*, he embodies the calm, intelligent, fatherly spirit of Murray's ideal man. He writes as a liberally-educated, merchant class man who has simply committed various collections of themed observations to paper (*Gleaner* 1: 1: 14-16), except when "he" writes on political matters. The essay "Necessity of Religion, Especially in Adversity" speaks forcefully on the role of religion and spirituality in post-Revolution France. Before the French Revolution, Murray hoped for the best for the French, remembering how the American Revolution, though difficult, had created and shaped her new nation. With the resulting bloodshed and tyranny that followed the French Revolution, Murray was more that disheartened, she was angry. Writing of her frustration in "Necessity of Religion," she looked upon France as a "temple of blasphemy, anarchy, and of atheism" (*Gleaner* 1: 31: 311; Jorgenson 76). Impassioned though she may have been, Murray's honest

and enduring dedication to Enlightenment ideals actually took her intellectually further than even some of our Founding Fathers would dare go. She went so far as to suggest, though it racked every fiber of her being, that, if the French people might be better served as a whole by uniting in an irreligious secular union, she would see it, not as ideal, but as better than further conflict. Going back to her linguistic judgments on the need for rhetorical education, she attacked the guillotine-happy French. “Miserable sophist!” she called the French secularist, demanding to know how one can justify turning people from God, “rending from innocence the sceptre of reason, and of placing it again in the hands of vice?” (*Gleaner* 1: 31: 313).

International politics were not her only interest. The new native politics also concerned Murray. In spite of the new nation’s freedoms and celebrated ideas of independence, Murray seemed genuinely shocked when political divisions and parties formed so quickly after Washington’s term in office had ended. The idea of the new and unified Republic died a quick death. “What a fearful and destructive hydra is faction,” wrote the *Gleaner* in 1794 (1: 26: 253). Charles Clark posits that political partisanship was the single greatest reason for the proliferation of newspapers in early America. Not only did political partisanship transform the nature of journalism, it reluctantly “remained the most distinctive feature of the American newspaper well into the nineteenth century” (Amory 1: 361). Murray’s published contribution to this divided political sphere was geared squarely toward the Federalist camp.

Some critics have called Murray a “simple Federalist” blindly following the Founding Fathers that she knew personally and supporting them because of their social position rather than their politics (Skemp 295-296). This reason for her allegiance holds some truth: she did know them and was, from birth, one of the many Americans who

would naturally have supported the Federalist cause. Federalism was, for Murray, the basis of good governance: “in one word, everyone seemed sensible of the blessings of a good government, and federalism was the basis” (*Gleaner* 1: 26: 253). Though Federalism was considered elitist by Jefferson and the Democratic Republicans, Murray was proudly so. While traveling abroad, she spent pleasant afternoons talking to Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. She enjoyed tea with Sarah Bache, Benjamin Franklin’s daughter, and, from 1790, Murray maintained a correspondence with Washington’s granddaughter, Eleanor Custus. These were the people with whom a woman from a prominent New England family, who had married a prominent minister, would have associated. The Washingtons and Adamses were also familiar with her family, conversing with her about her brother and the recent death of his wife (*GtoP* 162-166, 245-249).

For all of Murray’s religious egalitarianism, with regard to her real world politics, she was a bit of a classist, convinced that the preservation of the social, political and intellectual hierarchy was the goal of a good government. In fact, just after the War, she took it for granted that the new nation would not alter the stable and hierarchical order that buttressed her own social position. Even discussing global politics in her “Sketch of the Present Situation in America, 1794,” she sounds like Shakespeare’s Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* as she writes of the peace of degree and subordination: “Necessity her various grades designs, / And with subordination peace combines” (*Gleaner* 1: 27: 261). Going on to suggest personally established limits to freedom, she wrote that “genuine liberty recognized . . . her regular chain of subordination” (*Gleaner* 1: 27: 261). Her writing supports her belief in a structured governmental hierarchy that reflects her desire for a similar social hierarchy, based on

intellect and accomplishment.

In a beautiful counterpoint, Therese Dykeman contrasts Murray's published politics with those of her personal correspondent, fellow author and political opposite, Mercy Otis Warren. At least the social equal, if not superior of Murray, Warren was a vocal Democratic Republican, a populist Jeffersonian who believed in limited government and the power of the people. Her *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* from 1805 was referred to as an outright attack on the "monarchical" political tenets of Federalism (Markowitz 10). Dykeman points out one of their fundamental differences as follows: "Warren insists that leaders be virtuous; Murray that when people are virtuous, they may be leaders" (170). She goes on that while Warren felt that liberty and its accompanying responsibility would guide the "human need for preservation and distinction;" Murray, in her charming Neo-Platonist way, favored the creation of Order, from which freedom could be derived, extracted (171). Even on a very personal level, the authors are in opposition. After the publication of Warren's *History*, wherein she commented on the elitist policies of both Washington and Adams, the former President Adams would barely speak to or of her again (Zagarri 87). On the other hand, in one of the more obvious displays of her Federalist sympathies, Murray dedicated her three-volume *Gleaner* to John Adams.

Murray's strong political views, like those of Mercy Otis Warren, were published irregularly throughout the 1790s, but their feminine origins were nearly always concealed. It was one thing for Constantia to entertain an expanded educational background for young women; "the affections, motherhood and family, the education of children, morality, household management, and daily life" were well within the safe sphere of acceptable women's publication (Amory 2: 373-374). Politics, in views held

firmly since Aristotle, was the purview of the Male; women, with few exceptions, were not allowed (Kerber, *Republic* 7). Even as Murray, Warren and Hannah Adams laid the groundwork for women writing on politics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women were actually more forcefully excluded from public political life and publishing from roughly 1820 to 1850 (Zagarri 10).

During this early national period, women “read about and commented on political affairs more widely than ever before” (Hicks 267). Histories and historical literature were very popular and one of the most popular, especially with regard to feminine political consciousness, was the literary tradition of female worthies (Hicks 267). Murray herself was fascinated with the lists of worthies; her essay “Observation on Female Abilities” is little more than an edited and narrated gleaning of historical worthies that suited the purposes of her essay.

Ironically, while the power of print forged a new national identity, the role of the author, especially the female author, remained obscured. Though the new literary republic made space for and encouraged an active participation in the world of ideas through print, for a long period of time, the contributions by these early American women, or rather the credit for their contributions went completely unnoticed by the contemporary populace. Much of Warren’s work was completely anonymous. Morton was known simply as “Philenia.” Bowing to eighteenth-century literary custom, Murray also wrote under the guise of pseudonyms, female and male, to make her points before anyone could uncover that was a woman’s hand that had made them think.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Murray’s corpus as a whole was her exquisite and lengthy use of the pseudonym. She was certainly not unique in this regard: anonymity or, at least, pseudonymity was the eighteenth-century convention.

Political discourse or debate, literary criticism, or a simple letter to the editor was usually anonymous. The use of classical Greco-Roman pseudonyms during the Eighteenth Century was commonplace but purposeful. The pen names themselves are usually derived from words or stories that would already be familiar to the lettered public cognizant of the standards of European literature (Warner 84). Edwin Miles wrote that not only were the Latin names more familiar to early Americans, but also the ideal and example of Rome were “more rewarding for their contemplation” (263). Before the Revolution, the colonists were more willing to refer to social and governmental ties to their British heritage (259). The colonists who began using pseudonyms before the Revolution “still thought of themselves as aggrieved Britons and provincials” and adopted the British Whig tradition of anonymously criticizing the government (Shalev 152). After the Revolution, however, the newly emancipated colonists, the new Americans, “turned to earlier examples of the republics of Greece and Rome to sustain their faith in the success of their political experiment” (Miles 259).

Among the individual Founders, the use of classical references as pseudonyms not only helped conceal identity but also evoked the identity of the classical ideal. Alexander Hamilton was considered a master of the classical pseudonym, choosing them carefully and not always from the most well-known sources, forcing the careful reader to research the textual connections of the writing to the name (Adair 282; Shalev 154). Washington was often referred to as “Cincinnatus” (Miles 270), Adams as “Brutus,” the famous friend of the republic (Shalev 160). To similar ends, Revolutionary Era women also chose emblematic monikers for themselves.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Some notable Revolutionary Era women, like their male counterparts, indulged in classical pseudonyms. Mercy Otis Warren’s rather short-lived Republican pen-name was “Marcia.” Though her reference may

Though Murray certainly shared a republican fire with the revolutionary period's notable women authors, the political implications of her most famous pseudonym "Constantia" are much subtler than the domestic connotations. In its most exoteric sense, the name itself, along with "Constance" and the adjective "constant" all derive from the Latin stems *com* meaning "together" and *stare* meaning "to stand." This "standing together" lends itself to connotations of steadfastness and faithfulness ("Constant"). One can imagine that Murray was well pleased with these associations. She began using the pen name in personal correspondence to her aunt, Mary Sargent. Often referred to as "Maria," Mary Sargent and Murray shared an intense friendship over the years, each one reveling in the company and correspondence of the other. However, there is probably another "Constantia" that Murray had in mind. In her letters back and forth to Mary Sargent, she also mentions that Mary may call her "Julia" (Skemp 100). "Julia Constantia" was, in fact, the sister of the emperor Constantine I in the third century A.D. Most notable in the mind of Murray, Julia Constantia was remembered as an honored example of wife, mother and sister (Eusebius 20). Murray's essays, especially "Female Abilities," ably demonstrate the prominence of these roles in Murray's personal and social consciousness.

Generally speaking, those for whom writing was a serious, persistent endeavor would adopt a consistent public pseudonym so that their close circles, both familial and literary, would know the author. Murray was no different in her adherence to belletristic conventions; "Constantia" was as dear and personal to Murray as a part of her soul.

Two instances stand out as proof of her transparent and consistent cover. The first

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be to two Marcias, "[both] Marcias are of good character and known as domestic figures, visible to history chiefly by their connection to famous republican men" (Hicks 285). On the other hand, Abigail Adams used her republican nom-de-plume for years. Even in some of her most personal correspondence to John Adams, she refers to herself as "Portia," appropriately the wife of Brutus (282).

concerns a letter written to her cousin, Miss Goldthwait. Had Miss. Goldthwait paid even the slightest attention to a suggestive article in the *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1790 entitled “On the Equality of the Sexes,” she might have recalled a fiery letter written to her by her cousin Judith thirteen years earlier. In June of 1777, Murray had written to her cousin about her disgust at the idea of women being considered the weaker sex:

That Eve was indeed the weaker Vessel, I boldly take upon me to deny -  
Nay, it should seem she was abundantly the stronger vessel since all the  
deep laid Art, of the most subtle fiend that inhabited the infernal regions  
was requisite to draw her from his allegiance, while Adam was overcome  
by the softer passions, merely by his attachment to a female - a fallen  
female . . . . (F100L 63)

This heartfelt, if somewhat flippant, argument is espoused almost verbatim thirteen years later in her 1790 defense of women’s rights written as Constantia. Murray chose her pseudonym well.

Murray took a proprietary interest in the name as well. She became enraged in 1789 when another female author of some renown inadvertently used the pen-name. The poet Sarah Wentworth Miller had also used “Constantia” to publish poetry in the *Massachusetts Magazine*. It is certainly plausible that Morton simply didn’t remember that Murray had used the moniker five years earlier when “Desultory Thoughts” had been published, but Murray was nonetheless indignant. The editors of the magazine were apologetic, agreeing to label the new “Constantia” with an asterisk; however, Morton would soon change her pen-name altogether. Later, by way of apology, Judith wrote to the magazine suggesting that she was a “humbler muse” of “lowly verse” who

would not want her literary reputation, what it was to that point, to sully the greater lines of Morton (Skemp 214).<sup>7</sup>

Edward Watts makes a case for Murray's pseudonymic genius being on par with that of Benjamin Franklin (56). With blatant understatement, Franklin contributed greatly to the eighteenth-century pen-name game. Throughout Franklin's career, he employed multiple pseudonyms for various purposes. His earliest was the long-suffering "Silence Dogood," a "woman" with a more humorous, practical outlook and his most famous, by far, was "Poor Richard" Saunders of almanac fame. Unlike so many writers who simply adopted a pen-name to replace their real one out of convention or the idea that the writing should stand on its own merit without need of an authorial "sell," Franklin and Murray put their various pseudonyms to use. Franklin's characters had a purpose, a viewpoint based on who he created them to be.

Sharon Harris, referring to Murray's novella *Story of Margaretta*, notes the impressive juggling of voices: "her choices of narrator, style and themes [ . . . ] reveal the complex negotiations necessary for an eighteenth-century woman author, even one as well-educated and self-reliant as Judith Sargent Murray" (*Selected* xxxiii). Murray's many contributing characters played their part in her scheme of things. Only one charming example of Murray's use of a pseudonym to further remove her from her own

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<sup>7</sup>Murray's uncharacteristic reaction to Morton indicates how intimately "Constantia" was connected to the author. In addition to being the name under which she had "Desultory Thoughts" published, it was also the signature with which she had signed a fair amount of her personal correspondence. Though the pseudonym was important in ways difficult to describe, Murray's apology to Sarah Wentworth Morton in the early 1790s was, for the most part, that of a highly rational, intelligent woman of the Enlightened Age asking polite forgiveness for being much too overwrought at the inadvertent borrowing of a pen name. To Murray, the shame of her initial over-reaction was almost equal to the pain of her beloved pen name's loss. Morton, for her part, understood and has since been known by the pen name so closely associated with her: "Philenia" (Skemp 214).

plays is *Philo Americanus*. This is the “name” of the man who submitted *Virtue Triumphant* (which had previously been performed as *The Medium*) and *The Traveller Returned* to the Gleaner for publication in “his” book. Murray has used one pseudonym to submit work to another of her own pseudonyms (3: Essays 70, 80).

In what David Shields calls “a metropolitan strategy for attracting notice,” Franklin used most of his pseudonyms to entertain as well as inform, both serving to sell whatever he was printing at the time (Amory 1: 446). Murray, too, wanted to sell *The Gleaner*. Ironically, owing to the gendered nature of eighteenth-century printing, Murray originally adopted the Gleaner to say things that she felt needed to be said while, at the same time, she adapted to the publishing conventions of her time, hoping initially that people would not discover that the works had been penned by a female. In one of her most pointed discussions of her own pseudonym, Mr. Vigilius, “himself,” writes in *The Gleaner* of overhearing an extended discussion of his own true nature. Several of those conversing debated the nature of the Gleaner, asserting that his stories were falsehoods and that he himself “had in fact never been married; that he was a young man, a dweller in Worcester, and that he never having had a *bit of a wife*, it was impossible to tell what to believe” (1: 12: 124). Other personages speak of knowing or hearing about various characters in the previously published chapters of the novella; one claims that he was at Yale while Margareta was visiting and that he saw her at church. The entirety of the chapter revolves around the reader being told the story of fictional characters debating the veracity of another fictional character who happens to be the pseudonym of the author (*Gleaner* 1: 12: 124-130). As to the “Gleaner” as the name of both the character and the work, Murray explains all in the first essay of the first volume:

With diligence then, I shall ransack the fields, the meadows, and the groves; each secret haunt, however sequestered, with avidity I shall explore, deeming myself privileged to crop with impunity a hint from one, an idea from another, and to aim at improvement upon a sentence from a third. I shall give to my materials whatever texture my fancy directs: and, as I said, feeling myself entitled to toleration as a Gleaner, in this expressive name I shall take shelter . . . .(16)

Indeed, it is this “glow of emulation”(Gleaner 2: 44: 108) that Chester Jorgenson remarked upon when he wrote that Murray “was not smitten by a romantic faith in original genius. She accepted the neoclassical imitation of models as well as the classical idea of imitation of that part of the past which can take new life in the present” (75). This “neoclassical imitation” and gleaning of the ideas of others proved the way for Murray to truly explore her abilities and goals, transforming what she gathered into something new and expressive (Jorgenson 75).

Moreover, for Murray, the pseudonym functioned formally as well as strategically. The *Story of Margaretta* is a fiction embedded in a series of essays for the *Massachusetts Magazine*, written by Murray’s nom-de-plume, Mr. Vigillius, the Gleaner himself, who is at once criticizing the story, while writing it and being one of the main characters in it (Harris *Selected* xxx). The fact that Murray’s narrator gives “himself” a “real” name is perhaps one of the most interesting facets of Murray’s pseudonym- juggling style, especially regarding the *Story of Margaretta*. One could easily assert that the moniker game that Murray employed actually breaks down in this instance. The desire to maintain her Gleaner persona while simultaneously wanting to write an edifying and instructive novella causes the initial pseudonym to develop a

further and alternate persona as a more intimate and effective story-telling device. Though not necessarily confusing, one can easily agree with the contemporary and modern assessments that her work can seem unnecessarily convoluted. In addition to this convoluted structure, Watts suggests another dynamic within the voicing of *The Gleaner* and the *Story of Margaretta* in particular. Watts, in examining the tone and content of *The Gleaner* essays, derives four distinct voices within them: Constantia, author of the Preface and introduction; Mr. Vigillius, the Gleaner who produces the entire body of the text; Mrs. Mary Vigillius, whose maternal instruction is so vital to Margaretta; and Constantia again, author of the conclusion (56-57). Watts writes enthusiastically that “[perhaps] better than anyone else of the era, Murray succeeded in replicating the plurality of the unofficial and discouraged spoken and written languages of common usage in the new nations to confront both leftover colonialism and its competent inscriptions of marginality and sexism” (51). Watts supports his arguments by his readings of various essays in *The Gleaner*; but, away from her published work, Murray also used a variety of personae in her personal correspondence. In her letter books, we find the sociable, affable and entertaining “Constantia” that writes to her parents and female relatives; the reasoned, concerned, inscrutable “Judith” that writes to her brothers; and the cool, intelligent, willful, spiritual “Mrs. Stevens” that writes to John Murray. Murray was very adept at adapting her pen to its proper subject matter and audience. This type of social navigation in her personal life suited her literary efforts admirably.

Eventually, a conflict arose between desire and duty that would compromise her anonymity. For as long as she could remember, Judith had desired fame as a writer and as an intellect. To the general public, as she published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*,

she was the “Gleaner,” but many people knew who was actually writing the essays. The voice of her work was plainly recognizable to those who knew her or had followed her work, yet, for the protection of her “gentility” and her husband’s career, she would submit some work, especially her plays, under nearly complete anonymity. There were occasions when she would print out her essays so that so that editors and publishers could not determine if the essay had literally been written by a woman’s pen (Skemp 321). Later, as she and John aged, she grew disaffected both with the idea of fame behind a mask and with her financial affairs at home. John Murray, admittedly, had never had a head for finances, so he happily left most monetary decisions to Judith, who worked diligently to stretch whatever stipend he did receive, while adding what she could from her writing. On John’s suggestion and with his urging and encouragement, Judith decided to print her entire set of Gleaner essays in book form. In March, 1798, after months of agonizing with printers, deadlines and various monetary issues, *The Gleaner* was released. Initially having over seven hundred subscribers, Murray had one thousand sets of three volumes each printed. Murray herself explains the birth of the Gleaner as a persona: he was invented to both protect and defend her as a female author. For a time, “he” protected her identity as a woman and wife. Later “his” writings on every subject imaginable in the miscellany that was *The Gleaner* would defend Murray’s position that there existed no intellectual differences between the sexes.

In fact, it was only in the last article of *The Gleaner* that Murray admitted that the Gleaner was, in fact, a woman. She describes her motive plainly enough: she desired note as a writer. She also labors the point that every word of *The Gleaner* is hers. Though she detested Rousseau for his stance on the education of women, Murray could not deny his impact or the respect and admiration that others afforded him. Quoting

Rousseau, she writes of her apprehension that, should a woman let a man add so much as a word, her authorship would be denied, giving the male hand credit for the work. (*Gleaner* 3: Conclusion: 314-315). As long as the general public believed that a well-educated, traveled man had convincingly taken such positions on intellectual equality and women's education, Murray would continue with the ruse; but with her final foray, her *magnum opus*, Murray's ambition forced admission. Whatever praises or criticisms would be aimed at *The Gleaner*, Judith Sargent Murray would be known as an author.

Unfortunately, sales lagged and subscribers backed out of the enterprise for myriad reasons. Defeated, her desire for fame would never really recover. She had poured forth her best and the result was quite disheartening. After completion of *The Gleaner* in 1798, Judith Sargent Murray only published eight more poems over the next twenty-two years. Considered negligible by many, all the poems concern childbirth and motherhood. A pervasive sense of mourning fills the hearts of Murray scholars upon seeing her new pseudonym, "Honara-Martesia," attached to these last poems, signaling the strange death of the beloved "Constantia" (Harris, *Selected* xxxix-xl).

Print was powerful, yes, but not just in the instigation of religious or revolutionary overthrows; we must also take into account the importance of print as an educating and civilizing influence on humanity, an elevating influence on the history of mankind. Certainly, it was to this end that Murray desired to see her work in print. And she is not alone; many writers in this era bespeak what they consider a social danger in illiteracy. Only one beautiful example from many, the *Gazette of the United States* published this elegant, anonymous statement in the November 17, 1790 issue:

The inventions of language, of arms, of writing, printing and engraving  
have been the principal means of extending the influence of man, and of

his acquiring the dominion of the earth. By these acts the dispositions of men are softened, their manners become more and more civilized, humanity is gradually extended and refined and the grosser animosities yield to external politeness and decorum, at least[,] if the feelings themselves be not blunted. (qtd. in Warner 136)

With regard to her own output, Murray echoes the sentiments of the *Gazette* in *The Gleaner*. Within the Conclusion of *The Gleaner*, she writes that her essays’ “great business [was] to soothe and to bless the family of Man” (3: 317). Given the context of Murray’s life as a political observer, a domestic proponent and a religious devotee, this carefully worded phrase carries within it the full weight of those implications. Murray agonized over every word of *The Gleaner* so that one finds a certain deliberation in her layers of meaning. She wrote to express herself, certainly, but she also wrote for both the entertainment and the betterment of the public. It was also to this end that Murray became involved in the theater.

In the decades preceding the Revolution, plays were very difficult to stage in the colonies. In many places, performances were quite simply outlawed. In the 1790s, theater was viewed as a morally questionable activity. Not only did Puritan heritage frown upon the licentious and immoral brood frequently employed by and found in theaters, but the new patriots, as well, viewed theater as a European diversion, unsuited to American tastes and temperaments (Richards 279). Those who attended were viewed as no better than novel readers, inveterate wastrels.

The Federalist mindset in Massachusetts was split into camps. While there existed a segment opposed to theaters based on the fact that it brought together rowdy groups of lower-class Americans who would do better left apart, the majority of

prominent Massachusetts Federalists, including Perez and Sarah Morton, Benjamin Russell and the Murrays, regarded the theater as a potential “school of virtue” that would unite and educate all Americans (Skemp 252). The newly freed American states took a more liberal view of the theater and, in the 1780s and 1790s, playhouses began to spring up around the states (Richards 278). In Massachusetts, with its strong Puritan traditions, theaters were permitted in Boston only, remaining illegal in the outlying areas (Skemp 250).

It was only while traveling abroad in the summer of 1790, when Murray was 39 years old, that she saw her first play. The story of her entrance into the theater seems quite comic now, and even she was aware of the seemingly ridiculous lengths she would go to get her way. According to her letter of July 1790, while her husband was preaching one afternoon, Murray, secreted away by three of her local hosts, went to see an afternoon of plays. Given the still prevalent attitudes concerning the theater and those who would attend such a production, their hosts took her “in coy,” disguised with a long veil over her face and a black shawl over her shoulders (*GtoP* 178). It should be noted, however, that this disguise was never intended to fool John Murray. Coming from England just prior to the Revolution, he had been quite a theater-goer in his homeland. Her clandestine actions were instigated only by her and her hosts’ desire that the populace at large not see the Universalist minister’s wife attending such a questionable function. Judith Murray was utterly transformed, stating that at times during the performances, she became so excited that she felt quite unladylike (*GtoP* 178).

Later that same year, in the winter of 1790, several men in Gloucester decided to put on a small diversionary production to lighten the dreary Massachusetts winter

burden. Murray's literary talents were certainly well-known in Gloucester by this time and she was asked to write a few short lines by way of prologue or epilogue. Refusal to write was not in her nature, so when the play (and specifically her epilogue praising the theater) received rave reviews from its provincial Gloucesterian audience, new ideas began to form (Skemp 191). "[Were] a Theater ever licenced [sic] and established among us," she wrote in a letter, "it might, as I believe, unquestionably be made a school of morality" (qtd. in Skemp 191). Murray was aware of the dangers of bawdy plays from across the Atlantic, but she felt that the American theater would be the best place to transmit Enlightenment, Nationalist, and perhaps Universalist messages to the greatest number of people.

Murray's two extant plays, *Virtue Triumphant* and *The Traveller Returned* both express her ardent patriotism, her social knowledge, and, to a lesser degree, her enthusiastic Universalism. Though neither of Murray's performed plays received great critical praise, they do share the ardent desire of Judith Sargent Murray to produce an American play, to speak with a new voice to a new audience.<sup>8</sup> Some have suggested that the plays may have been too formulaic and wordy, more suited to print than stage; still others, that they are flatly derivative (Skemp 262; Richards 277). For years afterward, many scholars believed that *The Medium/Virtue Triumphant* had been written by Royall Tyler, even after Murray published the play in full as her own in *The Gleaner* (Tanselle 115). Though certainly influenced by all that she had read previously

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<sup>8</sup> Though her plays were not generally well received for a host of reasons, personal, political and critical, her play *The Medium* does have the distinction of being "the first play by an American author performed at the Boston theater" (Harris, *Selected* xxxvii).

on the art from Aristotle's Unities to Shakespeare's comedies to Tyler's *Contrast*, Murray's key inspiration may have been, as Jeffrey Richards suggests, the popular British comedy, Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (278). Of course, "inspiration" of this kind was nothing new to the theater, but Richards proposes that the parallels are too similar in plot, scenic division and character to be accidental. Like so many playwrights before her, Murray attempts to both Americanize the play and make it her own. Richards writes: "Indeed, what we see at work is not simply an adaptation but a reconstruction . . ." (282). Though there are enough similarities in the plays to merit the comparison of the plays, it is clear that Murray wants her characters to act, to behave differently, better, than their English counterparts. As far as political statements, aside from two offhand mentions of "Tories," readers feel only an overarching patriotism in the play, with characters inviting the audience to "observe a specimen of that spirit which actuates the bosoms of FREE AMERICANS!" [final accent Murray's] (*Gleaner* 3: 80: 124).

As has been noted, Murray was a woman who was very aware of the power of print. Even in one of her plays, Murray is very conscious of the printed word and how to manipulate it. In *The Traveller Returned*, Emily and Harriot discuss the notoriety of being "paraphrased" in the newspaper (*Gleaner* 3: 83: 150). With her knowledge of rhetoric, the worldly Harriot states that "the cynic has only to preface his invidious production by the little comprehensive monosyllable *we think and we wish*, while he thus hands my name to thousands, who would not otherwise have known that I had an existence" (*Gleaner* 3: 83: 150). When Emily asks if such scandal would not hurt Harriot, Harriot assures her that should any investigation come of it, she "should come out an *innocent sufferer* [ . . . ] and acquire a *prodigious deal of consequence*" for the

trouble (*Gleaner* 3:83:150)! Unfortunately, Murray, though evidently cognizant of the power of the local prints, was not able to manipulate it so ably in real life. Her protracted, printed debate with a contemporary drama critic proved only Murray's defensive posture and belligerent belief in her own ability. Additionally, the critic's opinion of her work seems borne out by history, accentuating the bitter sting of her initial indignation.

Murray's most conscious literary description of the transformative, life changing power of print is written directly into the conclusion of her novella *The Story of Margareta*. Because Mr. Vigillius writes these essays as first person letters to the "dear reader," one receives the impression that Murray is writing a love letter to the printed word, and all that that entails, in the last two chapters of *Margareta* (*Gleaner* 1: Essays 28-29) In these two essays, Margareta's estranged biological father finds her after having been gone nearly fifteen years. Following a series of unfortunate events, including shipwrecks and last minute rescues on the far side of the world, her father, Mr. Melworth, finally does well for himself in England. Always the repentant philanthropist, he happens upon a man ready to commit suicide and talks the poor unfortunate off the bridge's edge. Upon arriving at the man's house, Mr. Melworth decides to stay the night, making certain that his companion intends no further harm. While there, he begins to read his ward's old copies of *The Massachusetts Magazine*. Stumbling across the story of his own beloved Margareta, he reads the first ten chapters of her story, scattered as they are among ten different essays between *Gleaner* essays 2 through 21, and then determines to find his long lost daughter so that she might inherit his fortune. Though modern critics like Paul Lewis state emphatically that, on the whole, Murray never explored or utilized the full potential of her chosen medium (275),

the final two chapters of *Margaretta* are the exception. Only the serialized format of the *Massachusetts Magazine*'s "Gleaner" essays could have laid the extraordinary groundwork for the finale of Murray's fairy tale. In addition to the twisted narrative concerning the Gleaner, Mr. Vigillius, Mrs. Vigillius and Margaretta, readers discover that they were also reading along with Margaretta's own dear father before the full novella had ever ended, a full seven essays later, culminating in an incredible conclusion caused by the reading of the story itself (*Gleaner*: 1: Essays 28-29).

Whether a magazine article, a newspaper rant, a play, a catechism or a book, Judith Sargent Murray had a firm grasp on the power of the printed word. As a reader, she had been engaged and enthralled with the literary world from a very young age. Later, first as correspondent and then as writer, she hungered for literary recognition, for intellectual equality with those whom she admired and emulated. As her work proliferated throughout the 1790s, culminating in *The Gleaner*, Murray proves over and over her devotion to her ideals. Not only was she the eighteenth century's greatest advocate for women's intellectual development and equality, her transformed "gleanings" share with the world the innermost thoughts of a writer who was cognizant of every form of public discourse and the power that they held.

## CHAPTER II

## ALL THE WOMAN OF HER SOUL: MURRAY AND FEMINISM

In March of 2000, the *Christian Science Monitor* published a short article entitled “An Early Feminist Revealed in Her Own Letters.” Bonne Hurd Smith, whose work was the focus of the article, states that the restoration of Judith Sargent Murray’s work would “make women’s history more complete and well rounded. [Murray is] someone whose place in history must be restored” (Gardner 13). However true Hurd’s statement itself may be and in spite of the rush by literary scholars to recover and categorize works and authors within the canon of women’s and feminist writing, the “feminist” appellation affixed to Murray may have been premature.

While it is true that Murray, under the guise of the *Gleaner*, did call for women’s spiritual and intellectual equality throughout the 1790s, the dense, multi-layered term “feminist” may be stretched given what we now know of Murray’s life. Though true that one cannot necessarily judge an author’s work by his or her life, Murray’s writings tend to be inherently personal. Ample evidence exists from throughout her life to indicate that she believed and tried to implement the intellectual credos propounded in her work. Although noted scholar Estelle Freedman has attempted to trace “feminist” writing as far back as the fifteenth century, Christie Farnham raises a good question: Since the term “feminist” was not coined until the last part of the nineteenth century, can one categorize authors of previous eras in such an anachronistic fashion (6)? If Murray and others did not have the word to choose, much less the concept, can contemporary literature justifiably subsume her work into the category? Within the scope of Murray’s life and the majority of her work, Murray scholar Nina Baym answers: “[Had Murray] understood our contemporary feminism, she almost certainly

would not have applied the label to herself” (qtd. in Lewis 276). The social boundaries and times within which Murray created her social life and work and the last century and a half that have created three historically distinct waves of feminism are worlds apart.

Though completely deserving of the laurels she has posthumously received, Murray did not write many essays about female equality. Up to 1798, however, she did write probably more than anyone else in America on the subject, and those are the essays for which she is principally known. Her reasoned arguments based on historical womanhood and Enlightenment era thinking are well-written, sometimes even humorously ironic, but the reticence so consistent with many female writers of this era is still apparent. Murray, as a product of Massachusetts society, fought her entire life to maintain her position in that society. In her essays, she wrote of the derision with which people regarded “learned women” as being “unsexed” by their interest in intellectual affairs (*Selected* 6). Similarly, she wrote of how society viewed unmarried women and “spinsters” (*Selected* 6). These were attitudes and prejudices that Murray recognized and decried, but ultimately feared.

“Feminism,” as a social force, was something with which Murray was completely unfamiliar. Even as first wave feminism began to form, no more than forty years after Murray’s death, one must wonder how active she would have been. Initially creating itself from a combination of antebellum industrialization and a social expansion of the domestic sphere, the “movement’s” first goals were more oriented toward abolition and temperance (Travis 390-391; Kotef 495). Eventually, as the century progressed and women realized that their organized efforts could be effective, political and suffragist goals became more defined. Though Murray would certainly

have applauded their efforts with regard to slavery<sup>9</sup> and alcohol, one wonders what her reaction to the suffragists might have been. Murray relished her domestic sphere and was content that women should sway the vote from home with religious and political teachings. Giving away her classist misgivings about the duties of men and women, she wrote under the impression that women should, in fact, end their workday more educated and more able to help their husbands because women's work was less mentally and physically taxing than men's. In "On the Equality of the Sexes," of all places, she wrote that "we have more leisure for sedentary pleasures, as our avocations are more retired, much less laborious, and, as hath been observed, by no means require the avidity of attention which is proper to the employments of the other sex" (*Selected* 10). She drew "a sharp distinction between governments and nations," writing often that the "vote" was immaterial to the influence the body of the nation had on a country's principles (Skemp 289). All the people of a nation, male and female in society, created those elect who would in turn vote for the benefit of all of that society (Skemp 289-290). Murray felt this way about most all employments, especially those in government. Her decisions and thinking were constantly based, not necessarily on any reality, but rather on her belief in some ideal meritocracy that America was destined to become.

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<sup>9</sup> Though Murray's stance of race relations of the late eighteenth century has not been the focus of this work, her attitudes merit note. Murray's entire family seems to have been outside the realm of the sometimes vicious racism that permeated the society of that era. In a letter from 1785, Murray was genuinely puzzled at her failed efforts to secure employment for her brother's "black boy." She wrote indignantly "[that] these [masters of fishing vessels] are very obstinate, and very ignorant, as well as very proud--To all I could urge, a single objection was, in their opinion, sufficient--He was a Negro" (*Selected* 95). Later in 1790, she was thrilled to see slaves and African freedmen at John Murray's sermons all over the Northeast (*GtoP* 222, etc.) In addition, her introduction of stock comic servant characters in *Traveller Returned* that are specifically not African servants also bears mentioning, given her probable reliance on Cumberland's *The West Indian* (Richards 277).

Ruth Lister explains the especially strong political undercurrent of Second Wave Feminism: “As it implies, ‘feminist’ is a political identity that is rooted in a broad understanding of what constitutes ‘the political.’ It means that politics has implications for how we live our lives and for our personal relationships and it illuminates gendered power relationships and inequality in the private as well as the public sphere.” This is the definition of the Second Wave feminists’ rallying cry: “The personal is political” (443). Jane Flax maintains that even though Second Wave feminism positioned itself so socially and politically divided, its main weakness remained its narrowly focused demographic: “white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western woman” (906). As the movement itself moved toward an ever expanding role for women in all spheres, public and private, Murray would very likely have been uncomfortable. Though Murray certainly falls into the demographic of those who took up the mantle of mid-twentieth century feminism, progressive ideas concerning women in the workplace, daycare, birth control, divorce and sexual liberation (to name only a few) would have rendered the late-eighteenth century minister’s wife livid with indignation.

In response to the splintering of the Second Wave, a case of the movement becoming so broad and inclusive that it practically disappeared of ubiquity, contemporary Third Wave feminism seeks to refocus the various subgroups, including sub-genres based on race, nationality, income, sexual orientation, etc., into a more cohesive whole to avoid any future invisibility and backlash. If the First and Second Waves of feminism would have appeared awkward and immoral, respectively, the aforementioned groups of the Third Wave are so disassociated from Murray’s social sphere and mental world view that her relation to them, if possible, is inconceivable. Given her place and time, the greatest social upheaval of which Murray would have

been aware was the American Revolution itself.

The American Revolution was a turning point in Murray's life. She certainly wrote of it in her letters to family and friends; but, with the passing of a couple of centuries, hindsight offers some greater and far reaching effects on her life. Following the Revolution, the civic and social arenas of the new republic seemed, from a rhetorical standpoint, ready for anyone with a nationalist zeal. What actually happened after removing the imperial yoke was the establishment of a society operating under a new government with many of the same rules. Murray, who was Judith Stevens at the time of the Revolution, indulged her already consuming passion for worrying about friends and family. She assisted her Gloucester family in whatever ways she could and filled her free hours with writing to her brothers, who served with the American forces. After a visit by her brother Winthrop, she wrote some of her most intimate lines in a letter to him, dated November, 1777:

The day, if you remember, was sacred to mental enjoyments - but I alas!  
too gross for abstracted ideas, could not forbear anticipating the  
approaching hour of separation - the hour that was to snatch from me my  
beloved brother - perhaps forever - These reflections weighed heavy  
upon my spirits, - I could not forbear the rising sigh, or the gushing  
tear . . . . (*F100L 71*)

It was not often that Judith unleashed these dark, depressive sentiments, moments of intellectual weakness that she called "all the Woman in [her] soul" (*F100L 71*). Still, Judith would take every opportunity to push the gender envelope concerning what was proper. In another letter to her beloved Winthrop, dated February, 1778, she expounds on her desire for the end of the conflict, and then asks her brother not to

dismiss her notions out of hand:

The welfare of my Country, the interests of this extensive Continent, these, I do assure you, are subjects very near my heart - I am persuaded you do not yield your reason to the tide of vulgar prejudices, you will not say a female is out of her sphere, although, at this auspicious crisis, she should venture to express her solicitude . . . . (*F100L 77*)

Though she speaks of going “out of her sphere,” the reference belies Murray’s own personal notion of what a “woman’s sphere” encompassed. This strange post-Revolutionary mixture of new-found interest in the body politic, inspired by billowing banners and rhetoric of natural rights and liberty, coupled with the actual limitations of what women could realistically expect of their own involvement in this new and exciting scene created the phenomenon of Republican Motherhood.

Linda Kerber is the scholar responsible for the term “Republican Motherhood.” She also provides the most astute and concise explication of its origin:

Americans had inherited their political vocabulary from Aristotle, who believed that the good life could be realized only in the context of the public sector, a strictly male arena. Women were thought to make their moral choices in the context of the household, a woman’s domain that Aristotle understood to be a non-public, lesser institution that served the polis. (*Republic 7*)

This centuries old political paradigm was still in full effect even to the middle of the eighteenth century. While Americans had learned that national dependence was to be deplored, the “natural” social norm of gendered dependence was the way of the world, not “broken” and, therefore, not something that needed to be fixed (Kerber, *History*

111). Many women, as empowered as any man by participation in the Revolution, began to resent this social and domestic immurement. In her book *Revolutionary Backlash*, Rosemarie Zagarri writes of the new social and political landscape after the war. Women, traditionally barred from public and especially political arenas, became more seriously aware of their newfound political spheres (3). Kerber agrees, stating in *Women of the Republic*, “[that the] experience of war had given words like *independence* and *self-reliance* personal as well as political overtones” (189). Women like Murray and especially the writers Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Adams, all contributed to this post-Revolutionary zeal with their writings. Many of the women in print at the time, from Sarah Wentworth Miller to Warren and Murray, flew in the face of conventional social standard by being published at all. One could make the argument that given the time and society in which these women produced their work, the act of writing would be considered defiant in itself, “feminist” even; however, given the active and revolutionary spirit associated with modern feminism, these women would be hard pressed to find a comfortable place within that “active” context.

Although Revolutionary Era women were beginning to view themselves as independent political entities, the social and legal decrees against such independence were formidable. Though Murray was not only eager, but also able to write on political subjects far outside her domestic realm, she was content to write on every subject, whether she ever acted on what she wrote or not. In fact, even when the Revolution, whose spirit “laid great stress of the right to be free of burdensome masters,” did ease certain restrictions, such as laws regarding divorce, Murray remained aloof, if not outright condescending (Kerber *Republic* 11). While visiting New London, CT, in September of 1790, she wrote her mother of what she considered scandalous divorce

laws. Referring to divorce as a “peculiarity, admitted in the jurisprudence in this good state of Connecticut,” she suggests that the “marriage contract [ . . . ] ought to be differently worded in this State -- The parties should not be required to say until death do us part --” (*GtoP* 291) Noting her shock at meeting two women who each had two husbands living, she was also horrified to “have myself been asked, by a Connecticut gentleman, whether my first connexion [sic] was deceased, or whether I had obtained a bill!!” [Double exclamations hers] (*GtoP* 292). Even after her own profoundly loveless and economically disastrous first marriage and the exquisite happiness that she had since known with John Murray, divorce had never occurred to her.

Another facet of the post-Revolutionary atmosphere was the emergence of literacy as a social staple. Literacy after the Revolution, though growing exponentially, was still at a premium in the new republic. Women like Murray, Warren, and Adams had social backgrounds commensurate with exceptional literacy. Warren, though two decades Murray’s senior, had been reared in a politically active household in Plymouth, Massachusetts. An active and talented political writer and satirist, she wrote anonymous works poking fun at the British before and during the War, which were both lauded and encouraged by fellow revolutionary John Adams (Stuart 37). Later, in 1805, Warren, then seventy-seven years old, published her seminal work: *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*. In its three volumes, she not only composes an epic account of the Revolutionary era, but also makes judgments and prognostications on everything from “monarchical Federalists” to fair and just treatment of the Indians (Markovitz 11).

As early as 1897, Moses Coit Tyler, the preeminent eighteenth-century American literary historian and reformer (Murphy 1054), introduces Warren as “a

woman distinguished in those times by the vigor of her intelligence, her wide reading, her wit, her social charm, her high-spirited bearing amid the agitations and dangers upon which her life was cast” (qtd. in Markovitz 15). Generally speaking, Warren is not seen by either historians or feminist scholars as a feminist writer so much as a historian and radical revolutionary. Though she does write on the equality of the female intellect and the need for female education, and even corresponded with Judith Sargent Murray in this regard, her political and historical writings far overshadow her literature regarding femininity or the role of the late eighteenth-century woman (Skemp 69; Markovitz 18-19).

Sarah Wentworth Morton, the poetess “Philenia,” was also well published in the new republic. Hailed as the “American Sappho,” Morton also contended that “an author should be considered of no sex and [ . . . ] the individual must be lost in the writer” (qtd. in Amory 2: 368) while at the same time promising the reader that none of the duties of her domestic sphere had been neglected, writing only during “those hours, which might otherwise be lost in dissipation, or sunk in languor, are alone resigned to the unoffending charms of Poetry and Science” (qtd. in Schmidt 4). It is difficult to discern an active feminist in these writers when the practical makeup of their lives demanded a very strict public image be maintained.

On the opposite side of the social scale, Hannah Adams wrote volumes of local and religious histories. Of her style and output, her biographer Gary D. Schmidt writes that Adams was someone “who published aggressively, who wrote conspicuously under her own name [ and] who rejected the conventional female forms of publication--the poem, the play, the sentimental novel--for forms conventional in the male sphere--religious history, regional history [and] theology” (5). Of her desire to write, she listed

two reasons for her dedication to her craft: first, she needed to support herself, and, second, she wished to be “useful” in furthering the social aims of her new republic (Schmidt 10). Even after reading Murray’s “advice” for maintaining one’s femininity by either not writing or writing only novels, Hannah Adams died at a ripe, old age, an intellectual, “unsexed,” unmarried “spinster,” who was respected internationally for the depth and subject of her work (Schmidt 7-10).

For all its forward looking, rational argumentation, Murray’s work on behalf of women’s education, whether as “Constantia” or the “Gleaner,” continually maintained a politesse that stunted the force of its attempt at pure reason. Murray confidently asserted the equality of women and the necessity for education; Hannah Adams, however, was the first American woman to write a schoolbook. Released in 1805, the tome was an abridgement of her 513-page *Summary History of New-England* and the book was published at Adam’s own expense and copyrighted in her own name (Amory 2: 310). Compared with Hannah Adams, Murray appears quite passive, content to write rather than act.

With Murray’s firm Enlightenment embrace of Locke’s assertions of the unsexed *tabula rasa*, she eloquently argued again and again that restrictive society and an infantilizing culture created what people then assumed to be “women’s nature.” “Will it be said,” she wrote, “that the judgment of a male of two years old is more sage than that of a female’s of the same age? [ . . . ] But from that period what partiality! how is the one exalted, and the other depressed, by the contrary modes of education which are adopted?” (*Selected* 6). While true that Murray’s advocacy of specifically female education was sustained for most of her life and her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes” “anticipates twentieth-century feminist arguments that gender difference is not

innate but the product of culture,” her theories, based on her own examples, seem only to liberate women from domestic boredom and marital inefficacy (Keetley 58).

Her push for intellectual equality is strong, persistent even, but her illuminations and rationale for proof of her assertions are dated, and far greater, still somewhat hesitant: “Is the needle and kitchen sufficient to employ the operations of a soul thus organized?” (*Selected* 4). She encouraged study seemingly as often as she breathed, but like Morton, always encouraged the habit as a way to supplement rather than replace those feminine duties: “And should it still be urged, that the studies thus insisted upon would interfere with our more peculiar department [the domestic sphere], I must further reply, that early hours, and close application, will do wonders” (*Selected* 10). The question that immediately springs to mind is “How early?” If Murray’s writing has one great detraction, it must be her social status and its inborn predominance (even prejudice) in her literary and social mindset. One notices rather keenly that her remarks are pointed at women of her own social status, women who did have some time for leisure. Unfortunately, Murray’s impact could have been broader and more effectual had she only been more inclusive of women in general. For so many women in more impecunious situations, her suggestions have the potential of burden. Rather than replace some of the tedium of women’s work, she actually adds to it by inflicting study on an already wearisome day.

Again, with regard to education, the late eighteenth century has no greater or active advocate than Judith Sargent Murray; with regard to feminism, however, Murray’s motives for women’s education can be suspect. Murray encouraged young women to “reverence” themselves, and one of her primary motives was to promote a certain degree of independence in young women, including a less naïve, more educated

selection process for a husband. She also encouraged education as a way of being a better wife to a more educated man. In “Equality,” she writes: “Females [having been educated] would become discreet, their judgments would be invigorated and their partners for life being circumspectly chosen, an unhappy Hymen would then be as rare, as is now the reverse” (*Selected* 7). Even in her novella *Margaretta*, the story’s protagonist writes of what she has learned from her adoptive parents: “[A] union with a man of worth may rationally be the ultimatum of a woman’s wishes” (*Gleaner* 1: 8: 80).

Murray never really suggested scholarship as an option on its own terms. Being so conscious of the society in which she lived certainly limited Murray’s views concerning academia, which was safely outside the domestic sphere. Nowhere did she suggest that a woman’s education, in and of itself, would advance her. Education would make a woman more capable, yes, but more capable only of more prudent husband selection. At her educationally egalitarian best in “Equality,” higher education is still relegated to the service of matrimony. She writes of the illumination of the educated female:

In astronomy she might catch a glimpse of the immensity of the Deity, and thence she would form amazing conceptions of the august and supreme Intelligence. In geography she would admire Jehovah in the midst of his benevolence; thus adapting this globe to the various wants and amusements of its inhabitants. In natural philosophy she would adore the infinite majesty of heaven, clothed in condescension; and as she traversed the reptile world, she would hail the goodness of a creating God [, and women] would thus be rendered fit companions for those, who should one day wear them as their crown. (*Selected* 6-7)

While studying the cosmos, the newly enlightened young woman would at once be both edified by the evidence of God in His creation and made more intelligent for the benefit of her future bridegroom and potential children. One cannot forget the ideals of Republican Motherhood that Murray espoused: the education of the woman was for the benefit of society as a whole through the education of socially and politically aware children and the gentle guidance of socially and politically aware husbands.

Even as Murray wrote and contributed to her own cause, she still maintained a pragmatic eye to the place of different social classes of women. In a letter to John Stevens's niece Anna in 1782, Murray certainly insists, as she did in "Equality," that the "study of figures is pleasant, as well as useful" and that the "rudiments of geography, geometry, and astronomy [were] productive of instruction of the highest kind and of sentimental entertainment;" but, in the "practical" parts of the letter, Murray reminds Anna that she is a disadvantaged orphan (*Selected* 92). In addition, Murray writes that she will teach Anna "varieties of this truly feminine occupation, embroidery, tambour, flowering, &c, &c." (*Selected* 92). Furthermore, she recommends that Anna acquaint herself with "every kind of family work" (*Selected* 93). She writes, "These my Anna are, in female life, indispensable requisites, useful attainments, without which, we are incapable of sustaining with propriety, the character we are called to sustain . . . ." (*Selected* 93). One cannot argue that this is unsound advice in 1782. However, with such sound, practical and educational advice, along with Murray's favorite axiom of "reverencing" herself in the letter to Anna, the issue remains whether Murray's advice liberates women or merely facilitates their entrance into her already deeply gendered and classed society.

What Judith Murray actually tried to do was elevate the status of women and

their role in society: she did not, however, try to redefine or expand that role. Judith Murray, encouraged by every facet of her world, sought to honor the feminine in its most traditional sense, to glorify it, not because women could be manly, but because women could be the best women they could be in a still subjugated social context. In her “Observations of Female Abilities,” one must acknowledge the paradox. A female being published, for writing on women’s historic demonstrations of equitable virtue is impressive in and of itself; however, her list of virtues generally ends in the woman’s death for being a wonderful wife or mother. While the roles of wife and mother are sacrosanct, archetypal even, the women’s actions in her list of “female abilities” are all in relation to a husband or child, never of her own volition except as an exercise in aid to another. In only one of the numerous examples in her essays, she lists the Roman Arria. Upon the sentencing of her husband to death in A.D. 42, Arria killed herself as an example of bravery to her husband, handing him the knife herself, with the dying words of comfort, “Paetus, this gives me no pain” (*Gleaner* 3: 89: 200). The women throughout her entire list of human virtues are predominantly women helping their husbands achieve some political or personal goal (*Gleaner* 3: 88-91: 188-223). Again, even as the “Gleaner himself” speaks to the equitable abilities of woman, it is only an addition to the domestic duties that women already endure. While she certainly does encourage competency for a degree of independence, she has the Gleaner say that he does not wish to “unsex” the female reader, only to augment those already present feminine virtues of “modesty and gentleness” (*Selected* 43). “He” then goes on to quote a poet, most likely Murray herself, who expresses the Gleaner’s own feelings so articulately: “It is by the cradle of their children, and in viewing the smiles of their daughters, or the sports of their sons, that mothers find their happiness” (*Selected* 43).

Again, Murray's dedication to illuminating the respect due to the domestic sphere is admirable but limited.

Murray saw no apparent conflict with society being so ordered. In fact, as much as she might have attempted to push the boundaries of other social conventions or at least skirt their edges, the ideas of "place," "status," and the social implications of a republican *noblesse oblige* were completely accepted by her and many of her Federalist compatriots. In this light, one begins to understand the other mental and social concessions that Murray made in other areas of her life, namely her intimate and lifelong relationship with Universalism.

Her faith in Universalist tenets continually expanded throughout her life, but one belief in particular stood out to her: the spiritual equality of women. One could ask, what came first: Murray's attitudes concerning female equality or the Universalism that promoted this idea? To suggest that Murray's sense of entitlement may have been retarded or stifled by her continued involvement in the Puritan traditions of her town is idle speculation, but Murray biographer Sheila Skemp "stresses the extent to which Judith Sargent Murray's Universalist faith 'enabled her to structure and legitimize her stance on gender relations'" (qtd. in Bressler 89). Even though Universalism was, like all religions at the time, dominated by males, Universalism was also one of the fastest to change. By 1858, Lydia Jenkins of New York had been fellowshipped as a Universalist preacher; and, by 1863, Olympia Brown "became the first woman ordained with full denominational authority" (Bressler 89). Murray herself helped pave the way for these groundbreaking women. In fact, Charles Howe, a Universalist historian, refers to her 1782 catechism as a seminal work in the history of American Universalism (219). Though she was understandably proud of her place in the Universalist establishment,

Murray's role as the wife of "the father of American Universalism" both contributed to and stifled her status and output.

Whatever the progressive and positive steps Universalism took toward egalitarian spirituality, the church was still peopled with individuals cultivated in the eighteenth century. For all the hope and promise of Universalism that shaped and defined Judith Sargent Murray, we still find solid and explicit references that underline a social antagonism between Murray and her church.<sup>10</sup> Today, Murray's intellectual and literary achievements are generally lauded for what is historically regarded as a milestone in Early American literature. At the time, however, no matter what can be said of her public contributions to the popularity of John Murray, Judith Sargent Murray's private actions were highly suspect. On a personal level, Murray, in an effort to assuage vocal congregants and maintain her family's social position, curtailed her literary and social activities, or at least outright ownership of them.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Universalists were theologically liberal in their extension of Election to the populace, the religion itself is still considered a type of reformed Calvinism (Bressler 13). Their suspicions of the theater were as real and active as anyone's. After her initial, magical, clandestine foray into theater, Murray did more than dare to go to the theater, she took their daughter Julia Maria and went unescorted (though seated in a box away from the populace) (Skemp 252). Perhaps naïve in her

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<sup>10</sup> Universalist historian Charles Howe writes that for whatever contributions she may have made and whatever the "official" position of the Universalists concerning women, "her personality often caused John Murray problems with the leaders of his congregation, all of them men who were not in the least inclined to welcome input from a woman" (8). According to Sheila Skemp, by the time John Murray actually died, her church refused even to pay for the mourning dress that she had requested for the funeral (332).

<sup>11</sup>For more information on Murray's vast and varied attempts at pseudonymic obfuscation, please refer back to Chapter One, pages 10 through 22.

consideration of anonymity in this affair, she decided not to push her husband's patrons by becoming more apparent in her active involvement in this morally questionable enterprise.

Murray was certainly not alone as an American playwright or even an American female playwright. Mercy Otis Warren had written several plays before Murray penned one. Timing, however, was the key. Not one of Warren's plays saw a stage in her lifetime. In fact, Warren wrote the plays to be read, since their production as plays would have been illegal at the time of their creation (Stuart 216). In 1795, Murray submitted her play to the Federal Street Theater in Boston. In March of that same year, *The Medium* was performed. Murray submitted the play as authored by "a Citizen of the United States," with the double effect of engendering a hungry nationalist audience and concealing her identity once again (Skemp 254). A key point with regard to her anonymity and this play involves her husband. John Murray had already been reprimanded by some of his own church leaders for sermons that seemed overly animated or theatrical. For his congregation to know of any association with this play would have been detrimental. Murray even confided in a potential reviewer that if her husband's church members ever even suspected that John Murray had written a play, it would "totally ruin his interest among them" (qtd. in Skemp 258).

In one of the first reviews of the play, allegations of authorship arose concerning John Murray as the perpetrator of "The Medium." As his wife, Murray was horrified. Within three days of the play, trying to stem the tide of consequences, John Murray published a denial in the same paper, writing that he had never seen a word of the play before its performance (Hurd Smith *GtoP* 42). Though it may have seemed unusual for John to have been completely ignorant of a play that his own wife had written, the

incident does remain within the realm of possibility. In what is perhaps rare hyperbole on Murray's part, she actually wrote that her husband had not guessed that she was the Gleaner of the *Massachusetts Magazine* until its penultimate installment (*Gleaner* 3: Conclusion: 315). One could suppose that their distinctly different social and domestic spheres, in addition to John not wanting to know of his wife's "unwomanly" projects, may also have contributed to his ignorance. Moreover, with its lukewarm reception, single performance and personal embarrassment, there were several reasons not to be associated with this play at the time.

Within months, however, Murray had submitted her second play, *The Traveller Returned*, again to the Federal Street Theater. This play was performed twice on the ninth and tenth of March, 1796, and, though better received, proved infinitely more embarrassing to the Murrays. On a personal level, the more public involvement of a minister's wife with such a morally questionable medium, and an ensuing published letter battle between Murray and one of her critics proved quite an embarrassment for the Murrays (Skemp 259-260).

Concerning the plays themselves, the way in which her characters associate with and relate to each other also suggests an underlying religious message that is easy for an audience, contemporary or modern, to ignore (Harris *Selected* xxx). Murray's Universalism and peripheral proto-feminism are perhaps more broadly suggested in a play like *The Traveller Returned* where wayward, intelligent women are rewarded with dignity and forgiveness, rather than some socio-universal punishment. The same holds true for her male characters who apologize for being overly harsh and are then forgiven and welcomed back into the fold of family (*Gleaner* 3: 84: 157-162). These examples of forgiven, dignified women and repentant, idealistic young men were also ideas that did

not always meld well with the status quo. In addition to being “theatrical” characters and therefore immediately suspect, they also behaved contrary to the social norm. Not only that, but specifically the female characters are written to act almost in opposition to prevailing mores and received English ideas about a stock female character on stage. The most prominent example of what Murray believes to be a strong woman is the matriarchal Mrs. Montague. Montague is a reader of science and philosophy, who, by play’s end, has atoned for her sins, maintained her dignity and aids in the happy ending for all others concerned. According to Sharon Harris, any English theatrical counterpart would fail to hold Murray’s standards of redemption. Not only was it uncommon for a woman to use her intellect, either on stage or in the written word, most women guilty of the same sins as Mrs. Montague would have died almost without exception by their respective work’s end (*Selected* xxxviii-xxxix). Unfortunately, Mrs. Montague’s link to any outright feminist implications is tenuous at best. While Murray writes her as a strong and long-suffering woman, content with her mental pleasures, her dialogue and actions betray her. Paul Lewis describes Mrs. Montague as “typically wooden” (275). He goes on that “rather than have her speak insightfully, Murray has her read aloud at length from her own writings on physics. Later, when confronted with the startling possibility that her long-absent-and-presumed-dead husband is back, all she can think to do is faint” (275). When Mrs. Montague does come to her senses, she can only think to exclaim, “My enraptured spirit lowly prostrates to [my husband] Edward, and to Heaven” (*Gleaner* 3: 84: 162). With this assertion of unabated, saintly and wholly unnecessary obeisance, her final utterance on stage politely crushes any image of the strong, independent woman.

Unlike her contemporary Susanna Rowson, who appeared onstage as an actress

in her own productions, Murray refused to read a line onstage, or even claim outright authorship of any of her plays for some time afterward (Skemp 254). In fact, Murray would not claim authorship of most of her published work until 1798, when *The Gleaner* was published. Even then, she admits only that she is “Constantia.” The name “Judith Sargent Murray” appears nowhere on the tome. Given the prominence of female characters in Murray’s work, they act according to precepts of independent femininity that Murray had set forth in her essays, but she still hesitated to make any outright statement, feminist, political or otherwise. In her *Traveller Returned*, Mrs. Montague personifies the combination of Universalist forgiveness and feminine intellect that Murray adored. However, aside from reading “masculine” books of science and history, her greatest difference from the stock character of English theater remains the fact that, for a fallen woman, she does not die at the end of the play (Richards 283). In fact, Rowson’s plays, especially *Captives in Algiers*, were more frankly feminist than Murray’s. Not only did they include strong, independent women who defended their rights, the plays were political as well, with Rowson on stage front and center for all of them (Skemp 253-254). Much of Murray’s pause concerning a more forthright message is a culmination of several factors. First, Murray was simply not the playwright she wished to be. Literarily, the essay was her unquestionable strength (Hanson 9). Second, she was supremely aware of public opinion regarding theater, even benevolent, virtuous American theater. Third, she was the wife of a socially prominent minister who relied on the patronage of his very vocal congregation.

Although the public outcry was not enough to stop Murray from writing, she did go to extraordinary lengths to disassociate herself from her second and third plays. According to Murray’s explicit instructions, the theater’s manager was to take her

handwritten play to Newport for printing, where no one knew her handwriting, and she did not want him to even hint that the play had been written by an American (257). The aforementioned machinations speak to the very real social conventions to which Judith Murray was still willing to bind herself at this time. A few years later, when her plays were published as part of *The Gleaner*, hardly a word was said, since a written play and a performed play were worlds apart. These rather uniform social restrictions burdened Murray, but she endured for the sake of her family and their position in Boston society at the time. Not only were there outside pressures, but Judith's heavily proscribed notions of "gentility" and social stratification formed a self-limiting bubble that she preferred never to burst. Murray herself used the word "gentility" often in her correspondence to describe what she desired in life. In what is perhaps a telling outburst, Mrs. Vansittart, a villain in Murray's play *The Traveller Returned*, screams, "Content me! Lord, how can I be contented? no *jonteel* people are contented" (*Gleaner* 3: 80: 120). One sees here a true sagacity in Murray's words and, perhaps, a deprecating chuckle at her own expense, given Murray's express desire and life-long attempts to achieve this glorious and elusive social goal.

This bubble, this cocoon of Murray's own making, will, in fact, be the greatest stumbling block for twentieth and twenty-first century feminists so anxious to lay claim to one of the late eighteenth century's most prolific female writers. Her sense of entitlement and her notions of gentility associated with a certain social class, cultivated since birth, could never be overcome. Biographer Sheila Skemp asserts that "[in] her poetry, Judith often celebrated the pleasures of hearth and home, insisting that women were happy 'in their sphere' and enjoyed their 'domestic employments'" (194). Though modern feminists would never diminish the role of the woman in the home, the idea of a

separate “woman’s sphere” does remain problematic to many. In addition, Murray consistently reinforced the differing social and political realms of men and women.

In “Desultory Thoughts,” Murray again encourages education: “every thing in the compass of mortality, was placed within [the student’s] grasp, and that, the avidity of application, the intensesness of study, were only requisite to endow them with every external grace, and mental accomplishment” (*Selected* 45). Murray was convinced that any student with the proper desire could attain the pinnacle of knowledge, which included social graces. In the next few paragraphs, however, she relates the practical reason for this intellectual expansion: she does not wish to see young women seduced by the sinister flatterers, who would make of them another Charlotte Temple<sup>12</sup> (*Selected* 45-46). Indeed, the exact same argument fills the verbose corpus of “Equality”: women should be educated to avoid poor couplings: “If we meet an equal, a sensible friend, we will be assiduous to promote his happiness” (*Selected* 10). Later, in “Equality,” we find no humor or irony in her “spherical” argument:

You [men] are by nature formed for our protectors [...] upon this point we will never contend for victory. Shield us then, we beseech you, from external evils, and in return we will transact your domestick affairs [sic].

(*Selected* 10-11)

Murray’s beliefs are clear: women are mental, intellectual, spiritual equals to men. Socially and practically, however, their spheres do not overlap. Murray herself was frustrated over and over by these social constructs, yet she does not use her position

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<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Temple was the fictional protagonist of Susanna Rowson’s book of the same name. According to Cathy Davidson, the book is a “tale of a fifteen-year-old girl misled by a conniving French schoolmistress, seduced by a British soldier, and abandoned in a strange new country” (xii) who eventually “[sank] unnoticed to the grave, a prey to sickness, grief and penury” (Rowson 98).

as a late eighteenth-century public female voice to advocate these changes. Just the opposite may be true, and this can be especially maddening given the fact that Judith Sargent Murray, in the arena of public print, could arguably have been more (anonymously) influential on society than another vocal women's advocate, Abigail Adams, who had the ears of two presidents.<sup>13</sup>

Referring again to Murray's support of Republican Motherhood in the more political arena, the ideal gained prominence as political debates between Federalists and Democratic Republicans became more heated. "Over time, women's increasing politicization, along with the threat posed by women's rights produced a backlash" (Zagarri 6). Completely concurrent with the lessons of Murray's "Equality," women, they were told, could best serve the republic by educating themselves in order to instruct their sons and sooth their husbands, "they could mitigate party passions by acting as mediators between warring male partisans" (Zagarri 6). Kerber defends the ideal as an elevation of the traditional female roles: "The model republican woman was competent and confident. She could resist the vagaries of fashion; she was rational, benevolent, independent, self-reliant" (*History* 206). Murray's list of female notables in "Female Abilities" is a who's who of Kerber's definition. Murray was as well. Murray believed in these models and well she should. However, active, politically independent power of any kind was forthrightly denied. Though interpretation and the scopes of influence may be different, one cannot help but draw comparisons to that author most reviled and hated by Murray: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the 1760s, Rousseau had concocted an educational outline for women "planned in relation to man," which was

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<sup>13</sup> Though she would be a shrewd and consistent commentator on the American political scene and the injustices to which her sex was prone, Abigail Adams "was known [...] only in a circle which, though relatively large, remained private" (Kerber, *History* 57).

“[to] be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young” (qtd. in Emerson 143). Rousseau sought to create a pliant and servile helpmate to the masculine head of the household; Murray worked to create an educated partner who would, in fact, run the home for her husband, still the head of the household. Though the implications for the resultant female minds may be different, the implementations of both Murray’s and Rousseau’s educations sound dangerously parallel.

According to Freedman, the two qualities that define feminism are: (1) the rejection of the legitimacy of patriarchal rule, and (2) the initiation of social movements to alter laws and customs (xii). In answer to both of these claims, Murray decided instead to attempt to change the rearing of the potential patriarchs so that their rule would then be legitimate and their laws and customs accordingly rectified. If the Second Wave dictum is to be believed, that “the personal is political,” then Murray’s life of social and political appeasement in an era of codified and justified female suppression becomes difficult to defend. “Republican Motherhood,” a phenomenon supported and encouraged by Murray, must be considered the main point of contention prohibiting the full feminist embrace of her work. Though her advocacy of female education was strong and consistent, the impetus behind the education remains suspect. Murray wanted desperately for women to educate themselves not only for their personal improvement, but for the benefit of everyone in their domestic sphere. Murray, though politically active herself and desirous of a “mental meritocracy,” published all kinds of essays on politics, education, and society; but, she never actually encouraged women to remove

themselves from their proscribed roles, only to add education to these roles. Judith Sargent Murray did not encourage “feminism” as we understand this term of social and political independence today. What she encouraged was a new type of femininity where education and the development of the mind were as necessary and respected as the needle and the cook stove.

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